THE FUNCTION OF MYTHIC FIGURES IN THE TIRUMANTIRAM

THE FUNCTION OF MYTHIC FIGURES IN THE TIRUMANTIRAM

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ABSTRACT

The Tirumantiram is a three thousand verse Tamil manual of Āgamic Śaivism composed about the seventh century A.D. by a yogī sage known as Tirumūlar. This work was accepted into the canonical collection of Śaiva devotional works known as the Tirumurai, and can be shown to have significantly influenced the writers of the later canonical collection of Śaiva philosophical texts. Still, the Tirumantiram remains little known outside of South India and even less understood. Both Indian and Western scholars have tended to ignore this work which they commonly characterize as being obscure, opaque and esoteric. While acknowledging the presence of obscure verses and coded portions of the text dealing with advanced yogic instruction, it is my intention to show (a) that the Tirumantiram was composed for a wide-ranging audience of householders and rulers as well as learned Brahmins and trained yogis, and (b) that the aim was to reconcile tensions existing between various Southern Śaiva sects. I will also argue that Tirumūlar sought to accomplish this task by creatively explicating the metaphysical, moral and mystical aspects of Āgamic Śaivism with the aid of mythic figures in order to communicate his insights on a more popular level.

The mythic references incorporated into the text lend themselves to being studied under three general exegetical headings. That is, they can be distinquished as having an apologetic, tropological or anagogical thrust corresponding to the three facets of Saivism mentioned above. In the process of analyzing the mythic imagery and indicating how it was skillfully employed to develop major themes which are reiterated on a more advanced level in other portions of the text, it should become clear that, on the whole, the Tirumantiram was a unified composition and not a mere compilation of solitary verses as has been suggested by K. Zvelebil and others. To my knowledge, this is the most protracted study of the Tirumantiram in English since A. Visvanatha Pillai produced his translation and commentary on several hundred selected verses in the mid 1960's.

The numbering of Tirumantiram verses cited or quoted in this study follows that found in G. Varadarajan's Edition. The latter was chosen because it is both reliable and more readily available than other responsible editions. For words I have followed the form of transliteration adopted by standard works on Indology. As for the transliteration of Tamil, several systems are currently in use. Here I will follow that set forth in the Madras Tamil Lexicon.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Akam	:	Akanānūṟu
Aiṅkuṟu.	:	Aiṅkuṟunūṟu
Cilap	:	Cilappatikāram
C.N.C.	:	Civa Ñāṉa Cittiyār
Kali.	:	Kalittokai
Kuṟal	:	Tirukkuṟal
Kuṟiñci.	:	Kurincippattu
Kuṟun	:	Kuṟuntokai
Maturai	:	Maturaikkañci
Maṇi	:	Maṇimēkalai
Mullai.	:	Mullaippattu
Naṟṟi.	:	Naṟṟinai Nānūṟu
Pari.	:	Paripāṭal
Paṭiṟṟu.	:	Paṭiṟṟuppattu
Perumpan.	:	Perumpanaṟṟuppaṭai
Porun.	:	Porunarāṟṟuppaṭai
Puṟam	:	Puṟānanūṟu
SP	:	Śiva Purāṇa
Tirumuruku.	:	Tirumurukāṟṟuppaṭai
Tol.	:	Tolkāppiyam
TM	:	Tirumantiram
U. V.		Uṇmai Viḷakkam

TRANSLITERATION

OF TAMIL

Vowels		Consonants	
அ	a	க்	k
ஆ	ā	ச்	c
இ	ī	ஞ்	+
ி	i	ட்	ṭ
உ	u	ப்	p
ூ	u	ற்	r̲
எ	e	ர்	r
ஏ	ē	ங்	ṅ
ஐ	ai	ஞ்	ñ
ஒ	o	ண்	ṇ
ஓ	ō	ன்	n̲
		ந்	n
ஔ	au	ம்	m
		ய்	y
		ல்	l
		ள்	l̲
		ழ்	l̲
		வ்	v
		ஃ	k̲

TRANSLITERATION

OF SANSKRIT

Vowels

अ - a
आ - a
इ - i
ई - ī
उ - u
ऊ - ū
ऋ - ṛ
ॠ - ṝ
ए - e

ऐ - ai
ओ - o
औ - au
ऌ - ḷ
ॡ - ḹ

ं - ṇ or ṃ
ः - ḥ (visargah)

Consonants

क - k
ख - kh
ग - g
घ - gh
ङ - ṅ
च - c
छ - ch
ज - j
झ - jh
ञ - ñ
ट - ṭ
ठ - ṭh
ड - ḍ
ढ - ḍh
ण - ṇ
त - t
थ - th

द - d
ध - dh
न - n
प - p
फ - ph
ब - b
भ - bh
म - m
य - y
र - r
ल - l
ळ - ḷ
व - v
श - ś
ष - ṣ
स - s
ह - h

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I. GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The inadequacy of the nineteenth century use of the term 'Hinduism' to designate the religion of India has rightly been exposed in the writings of such diverse scholars as P. V. Kane and W. Cantwell Smith.[1] Still, research into the development of the religious traditions of the Śaivas, Vaiṣṇavas, Śāktas and Smārtas, and into the history of their interactions, does reveal a distinctive pattern of preserving, assimilating and reconciling religious diversity which could be properly called 'the Hindu way' or the phenomenon of Hinduism.

In South India, the Hindu proclivity for synthesis clearly manifests itself in the philosophy and practice of the Southern school of Śaivism known as the Śaiva

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[1] The term 'Hindu' was first used by the Persians in the 5th century B.C. to designate the territory and the inhabitants of the river Sindhu. Later, it was used by the Muslim Arab invaders to refer to the non-Muslims; and only in 1829 was the abstract notion of Hinduism introduced into the West. The latter is inadequate in several ways: i) it is anachronistic to employ it when describing the Vedic period; ii) as an abstract 'ism', it tends to disguise the dynamic adaptive quality of a living religious community; iii) in a reified state, the term fails to suggest the variety of distinct sects, cults and religious philosophies found in the Hindu tradition. See P. V. Kane, History of the Dharmaśāstras, (Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute, 1958, vol. 5, part 2, p.1613;) and Wilfred Cantwell-Smith, The Meaning and End of Religion, (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), p.64.

Siddhānta. This branch of Śaivism was nourished by two autonomous cultural streams. Its philosophical and ritual orientation can be traced to the Vedic and Āgamic traditions which apparently were introduced from the North, while the fervent and emotional character of its devotional life indicates how strongly its worship has been influenced by the Tamil culture of the South.

The sacred literature of the Siddhāntins reflects this mixed or synthetic character. Besides explicitly acknowledging the authority of the Sanskrit Vedas and Āgamas, special canonical recognition is given to a twofold collection of Tamil devotional and philosophical works known as the Tirumurai and Meykanta Śāstras, respectively.

> As they expound all the truths, the Vedas and the Āgamas are called mutal nūl (the first scripture). Their immeasurable meanings are given out by those who possess the grace of God...Others try to interpret them according to their own sense and found various schools...Nothing can, however, compare with the Vedas and Āgamas. We cannot find anything to say to those who would assert otherwise.[1]

Thus it can be said that there was a conscious effort to integrate Northern (Sanskritic) and Southern (Tamil) elements. Such a conciliatory posture was neither inevitable

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[1] Civañāna Cittiyār, VIII. 14.

nor even commonplace. In fact, the acceptance of both the Vedas and the Āgamas as well as a Tamil canon, distinguishes Śaiva Siddhānta from various other important schools of Indian thought. It sets them apart from the nāstika or unorthodox sects such as the Lokāyatas, Buddhists and Jains who rejected both the Vedas and Āgamas; from the Mīmāṁsākas, Sāṁkhyas, Yogins and Ektatmavādins who accepted only the Vedas; and from the followers of the Pāśupatas, Kāpālas and others who had their own Āgamas, but who did not relate their doctrines to the Vedas or develop any Tamil canon.[1] Even the school of Kashmir (Pratyabhijña) Śaivism, to which some would trace the early development of Śaiva Siddhānta,[2] does not recognize

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[1]G. Subramanya Pillai, "Introduction and History of Śaiva Siddhānta" in Collected Lectures on Śaiva Siddhānta 1946-1954 (Annamalainagar: Annamalai University, 1965), p. 16. Ramānuja in his Śri-Bhāṣya II.2.37 specifically identifies the Kāpālikas and Kālāmukhas as sects with an anti-Vedic bias. S. Das Gupta, A History of Indian Philosophy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), vol. 5, p. 2. In the Śaiva tradition itself, the āstika-nāstika (i.e., orthodox-unorthodox) distinction is given less attention than the division into "inner" and "outer" schools, a classification which is determined on the basis of the school's degree of commitment to the Vedas and Āgamas.

[2]Among the various positions held on this issue, one suggests that the tenets of Śaivism were brought from the North by Tirumūlar; another proposes the opposite, that Mūlar went North, and influenced the Pratyabhijña, school. See N. Murugesa Mudaliar, The Relevance of the Śaiva Siddhānta Philosophy (Annamalainagar: Annamalai University, 1968), pp. 149-151. A more balanced comment on this matter comes from J. Gonda in his work on Medieval

the authority of the Vedic texts[1] despite the fact that its own advaita metaphysics and doctrinal emphasis on consciousness is consonant with Vedāntic thought in many respects.[2]

In terms of having adopted a Tamil canon and having sought to reconcile the teachings of both the Vedas and Āgamas, there is only one Hindu sect with which the Siddhāntin must share the Southern stage. That is the Vaiṣṇava sect of the Pāñcaratrins. For the latter accepted the Tamil hymns of the Vaiṣṇava bhakti saints (the Āḻvārs) and, under the leadership of the ācārya Yāmuna, they, too, made a deliberate attempt to link their Āgamas or Saṃhitās[3] with the teachings of the Vedas. Even so,

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Religious Literature: "It has been assumed that Kashmirian Śaivism is more original than its Southern counterpart which then would have derived from it. In view of such facts as the antiquity and comparatively early spread of the worship of this god and of the many cultural contacts between Kashmir and the South as well as between these regions and other parts of India, this hypothesis does not seem to carry conviction." (Otto Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden, 1977), p. 162.

[1]Jan Gonda, Viṣṇuism and Śaivism (London: School of Oriental Studies, Munshiram Manoharlal Pub. Pvt. Ltd., 1976).

[2]Unlike Śaṅkara, the Kashmir school does not teach either the infallibility or the eternity of the Vedas. Its position may reflect the influence of Sāṁkhya and Buddhism. See P. Jash, History of Śaivism (Calcutta, Roy and Chaudhury, 1974), p. 121.

[3]While the Śaivas refer to their texts as Āgamas, the Vaiṣṇavas generally prefer to call their works Saṃhitās.

the Śaiva Siddhāntins are distinguished by the fact that their conciliatory stance appears to have been formulated several centuries earlier than that of the Pañcarātrins. While the 4000 hymns of the Āḻvārs were compiled in the late 9th or early 10th century by Nāthamuni (824-924)[1] and while Yāmuna's effort must be placed in the 11th century, the formal statement of the Siddhāntin position can already be found in the work of a yogī sage known as Tiru Mūlar who lived prior to the 9th century.

It is with a view to clarifying Tirumūlar's contribution to the process of linking the Vedic, Āgamic and Tamil bhakti cults that the present study is being undertaken. In this study, we will explore the creative and unitive vision propounded by Mūlar in his Tamil treatise, the Tirumantiram. Since neither this sage nor his work are widely known or discussed outside of South India, some introductory remarks are needed.

THE AUTHOR

The tradition's understanding of Mūlar's role has been preserved in a 12th century hagiography popularly

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[1]Thomas Hopkins, The Hindu Religious Tradition, (California: Dickenson Publishing Co., Inc., 1971), p. 118. See also K. Zvelebil, Tamil Literature, (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1974), p. 91.

known as the Periya Purāna.[1] According to this legendary account, the composer of the Tirumantiram was an accomplished Śaiva yogī who was journeying to South India from the Himalayas in order to visit his friend, the sage Agastya. Enroute, in the vicinity of Tiruvāṭuturai, not far from Citamparam, our traveller happens to come across a herd of grief-stricken cows who have lost their master. Moved to compassion by the grace of the Lord Śiva, our sage employs his yogic powers to enter the body of the dead cowherd called 'Mūlan' and thus acquires the name 'Mūlar.' While still inhabiting this borrowed body, the yogī sage comes to understand that the Lord Śiva is commissioning him to make the new body his own in order that he may remain in the South and express Āgamic truths in the Tamil tongue.

Despite the tendency of many Indian Tamil scholars to defend the literal interpretation of this narrative, the underlying point of the legend seems clear. A northern yogī (an Aryan?) enters into the Tamil culture with a special sensitivity for its ethos and, in the process, comes to appreciate it as a God-given vehicle that is well

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[1]The author, Cēkkilār, called the work the Tiru Toṇṭar Purāṇa because it provides a list of the names and deeds of some 63 Śaiva saints (toṇṭar). Its popularity, however, caused it to become known as the Great (periya) Purāna.

suited for religious expression. Having personally experienced the 'corpus' of two distinct traditions, and having arrived at an existential resolution of the tension between them, he finds himself once again moved by grace to share his insights in the vernacular of his newfound flock. That is, he is asked to adapt to the culture of the people whom he is to instruct. Understood in this way, Cēkkilār's legend indicates that over the centuries, Mūlar's life had come to be understood as but a preparation for his life's work, namely, the composition of the Tirumantiram.

In describing the author as one who had entered into the body of a cowherd, Cēkkilār was building on a legend which seems to have developed over several centuries. The earliest reference to this sage which is found in the ninth century Breviary of Saints (Tiruttontar Tokai), contains no allusion to such an incident.[1] It is roughly a century later before we come across the germ of this story recorded in a single verse in the

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[1]This Breviary, which was composed by Cuntarar, one of the Tēvāram saints, refers to Mūlar in one simply-worded line: "Nampirān Tirumūlanatiyārkkum atiyen" (I am the servant of the servants of our patron and lord Tirumūlan).

"Tiruttoṇṭar Tiruvantāti" of Nampi āṇṭār Nampi.[1] In verse 36 of this work, Mūlar is presented as having entered the body of a cowherd and as having praised Śiva according to the Vedas:

> kuṭimannu cāttanūrk kōkkula mēyppōṉ kurampaipukku
> muṭimannu kūnaṟ piraiyāḷaṉ ṟannai mulūttamiḻiṉ
> patimannu vettiṉ coṟppatiye[2] para viṭṭennucci
> alimanna vaitta pirāṉmūla nākiṉṟa vaṅkaṉṉe.
>
> The revered man by the name of Mūlaṉ,
> who entered into the body of the shepherd of
> Cāttanūr,
> who hailed the Lord with the crescent moon in
> full Tamil,
> in accord with the Vedas which are celebrated
> throughout the world, - him I praise.

Cēkkiḻār's hagiographic account is clearly an expansion of this verse. What is important to recognize, however, is that both Nampi and Cēkkiḻār are noted as writers who carefully studied the works of the saints whose lives they recorded.[3] If we examine Cēkkiḻār's hagiographic account,[4] for example, we find that many of

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[1]Nampi āṇṭār Nampi was the 11th century compiler of the Śaiva canon known as the Tirumurai.

[2]A very literal rendering of the phrase muluttamilin patimannu vettin corppatiyē would be 'in accord with the Vedas of Tamil celebrated throughout the world.' This would suggest his work was faithful to the Tēvāram, otherwise known as the Tamil Veda, but it seems the point being made by Nampi is that Mūlar's Tamil treatise was in agreement with the Sanskrit Vedas.

[3]For further comment on Cēkkiḻār's research see The Development of Śaivism in South India, by M. Rajamanickam (Dharmapuram, India: Dharmapuram Adhinam, 1964, pp. 4, 5.

[4]Actually, the Periya Purāṇa is more than a popular hagiography. It is also hailed as an epic and compared with the famous medieval Jaina epic, the Jīvaka Cintāmaṇi. Tradition holds that Cēkkiḻār composed his work in order to wean the reigning Cōḻa king away from his study of the latter.

the details contained therein can be traced to material provided in the autobiographical verses of the Tirumantiram. Still, it is necessary to point out that the details mentioned in the latter do not necessarily support the interpretation which is given in the Periya Purāṇa. In most instances, the legend surrounding Mūlar appears to have been derived from a thoughtful and imaginative play on words. Examining the following verse, it can be seen how Nampi and Cēkkiḻār could have constructed this legend from material provided in certain autobiographical statements.

nanti arulālē mūlaṉai nāṭi
By Nandi's (Śiva) grace I sought Mūlaṉ.
(TM 92)

cittattiṉ uḷḷē cirakkiṉṟa nūlkaḷil
uttama mākavē ōtiya vētattiṉ
otta uṭalaiyum uḷniṉṟa uṟpatti
attaṉ eṉakkiṅ karuḷāl aḷittatē
Among the books that kindle a glow in the heart,
The revealed Vedas stand as the highest.
The Father, the Lord who abides within me,
Graciously gave me that which resembles a body
and (a soul).
(TM 84)

In Tamil, as in Sanskrit, the word 'mūlam' means root, origin, cause. 'Mūlaṉ' is the masculine form of the word. In the context of verse 92 it refers to Śiva who is the primal cause of yogic bliss. For his hagiographic purposes, however, Cēkkiḻār takes 'mūlaṉ' as a proper

name.[1] A similar play on words occurs in the case of the expression 'utalaiyum' used in the third line of verse 84. 'Utalaiyum' is an abbreviated way of saying 'body and soul' (utal-body; um-and...). A literal reading could be taken to imply that Śiva gave our yogī sage the body and soul of the shepherd, Mūlaṉ. But since the stanza in question is dealing with the Vedas and the highest truth contained therein, it is more correct to understand the phrase 'utalaiyum' as a poetic way of stating that the Lord gave this sage the Vedic word (body) and its meaning (soul). Since Tamil grammar commonly speaks of consonants as the 'body' and vowels as the 'soul', such a metaphorical reading is by no means unusual.

Contrary to what the reader might expect, this critical analysis of Cēkkiḻār's account of Tirumūlar is not meant to call into question its validity; rather, it is intended to challenge a superficial acceptance of it. Viewed as a straightforward biographical sketch, the Periya Purāṇa

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[1]Only in three verses, which most likely were added to the Tirumantiram later, is 'Mūlaṉ' used as a proper name (vss. 99, 101, 3046). These speak only of his having composed a treatise or founded a Mutt. There is no hint of Cēkkiḻār's legend. With these exceptions, the occurrences of the noun in its various forms - mūla (vs. 622), mūlan (vss. 92, 642), mūlattu (vss. 580, 583, 627) - refer to either Śiva or to the mūlādhāra cakra, the source of the kundalinī located at the base of the spinal column.

narrative strains the credulity of all but the most conservative. Viewed as a historical commentary on the significance of Mūlar's life and work, Cēkkilār's portrayal impresses one as being particularly perceptive and remarkably credible.[1]

THE TEXT

Tirumūlar's treatise, the Tirumantiram, is a Tamil work which draws heavily on Sanskritic texts known as Śaivāgamas.[2] It forms the tenth book of the Śaiva canonical collection known as the Tirumurai.[3] It gained a

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[1]Cēkkilār's account of Tirumūlar's life is found in verses 3564-3590 of the Periya Purāṇa.

[2]For further discussion of these works see chapter 3 of this study.

[3]The canon of devotional works known as the Tirumurai (Sacred Writings) consists of 12 books:

Books I-III	Hymns of Campantar (7th cent. A.D.)
Books IV-VI	Hymns of Tirunavukkaracar (Appar) (6th-7th cent. A.D.)
Book VII	Hymns of Cuntarar (9th cent. A.D.)
Book VIII	Tiruvācakam of Manikkavācakar (9th cent. A.D.) Tirukōvaiyar
Book IX	Joint works called Tiruvicaippakkāl by nine Śaivites and Tirupallāntu by Centanar
Book X	Tirumantiram by Tirumūlar (6th-7th cent.A.D.?)
Book XI	Poetic works of eleven poets including Nakkiratevar's Tirumurukarruppatai and 10 works of Nampi āṇṭār Nampi
Book XII	Periya Purānam by Cēkkilār (12th cent. A.D.)

position of honor in this Tamil canon of devotional works because of its ability to capture the spirit of religious devotion (Tml. patti; Skt. bhakti) and love (Tml. anpu). The work is unique, however, in that it is the only member of this twelve book compilation of devotional literature to also qualify as a śāstra or disciplined exposition of Śaiva belief and practice. As such, it is recognized as the earliest systematic formulation of Śaiva Siddhānta thought:

> Although the four great leaders of Śaivism who flourished before the eighth [sic] century[1] have given distinct expression to the principles of the system in their sublime devotional lyrics, an exposition of the same in a scientific manner is found only in Saint Tirumūlar's Tirumanthiram, Jñāna-mirtham, Tiruvuntiār, Tirukkaḷirruppatiar and a few other books prior to the age of Śri Meykaṇḍār...in the 13th century.[2]

Initially, the śāstric character of the treatise seems to have militated against its immediate popularity. That is, it was too philosophical to be recited at temple festivals or other large religious gatherings as were the hymns of Appar, Campantar, Cuntarar and Māṇikkavācakar.[3]

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[1]Appar (7th c.), Campantar (7th c.), Cuntarar (9th c.), Māṇikkavācakar (9th c.?).

[2]G. Subramanya Pillai, "Introduction and History of Saiva Siddhanta", Collected Lectures, p. 11.

[3]Although the Tirumantiram was adopted into the Tamil canon in the 10th or 11th century, it came to be neglected in the centuries that followed as commentators turned their attention to the 14 philosophical works compiled in the second Śaiva canon. Consequently, it was not until the late 1800's that Tamil scholars once again began to concern themselves with the content of the Tirumantiram itself.

Nevertheless, the impact of Mūlar's treatise on the later tradition was significant. Gradually, many of his insights such as those regarding the relationship between Sanskrit and Tamil, between the Vedas and Āgamas, between knowledge (ñāna) and devotion (patti) were woven into and preserved in the philosophical tapestry of the second canonical collection of Tamil Śaiva writings.

The latter, called the Meykaṇṭa Śāstras, is a compilation of fourteen śāstras. Of these, two in particular have been so influenced by Mūlar's religious sensitivity and creative vision that they not only reflect the spirit of the Tirumantiram but they obviously adopt its language as well. For example, there can be no doubt that the Civañāna Cittiyār, a twelfth-thirteenth century work composed by Aruḷ Nanti, was dependent on the unifying vision proposed centuries earlier by the sage Tirumūlar.

> The only real books are the Vedas and Śaivāgamas..of them, the Vedas are general, and given out for all; the Āgamas are special and revealed for the benefit of the blessed, and they contain the essential truths of the Vedas and Vedānta.
> (C.N.C. VIII. 15)

> The Vedas together with the Āgamas
> are the true (word) of the Lord's
> Scripture.
> One is general, the other particular.
> If one were to understand, both are
> revelations of the Lord.
> (They are) different some people say;
> (but) to the great they are non-
> different (i.e., non-discrepant).
> (TM 2397)

Similarly, there can be no doubt but that the Unmai Vilakkam of Manavācakam-Kaṭantār (A.D.1177) was inspired by Mūlar's mystical interpretation of Śiva's great dance, a dance which had captured the hearts of the Tamil Śaiva bhaktas.

> Understand that creation emanates from the drum,
> preservation from the hand of hope,
> destruction from the fire held in one hand,
> obscuration (tirobhava) from the foot which presses down
> and deliverance (mukti) from the foot held aloft.
>
> (U.V. vs. 35)

> Creation (śṛsti) is (represented by) the drum,
> preservation (sthiti) is the abhaya gesture,
> involution (samhāra) is the hand with the fire,
> the pressing foot is obscuration (tirobhava),
> the descent of grace (anugraha) is the uplifted foot.
>
> (TM 2799)

The first of these verses (i.e.2397) has been widely quoted by Indian scholars[1] as the example of the harmonizing efforts of Tirumūlar. Having been cited in this way, it appears to be viewed as a basically apologetic formulation. The second verse which describes the mythic imagery

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[1] "Here, we see the manner in which Tirumular establishes the reconciliation between the Vedas and the Śaiva Āgamas." C.V. Narayana Ayyar, Origin and Early History of Śaivism (Madras: Madras University, 1974), p. 255. Also N. Murugesa Mudaliar, The Relevance of Śaiva Siddhānta Philosophy (Annamalainagar: Annamalai University, 1968), p.57, and V. Paranjoti, Śaiva Siddhānta (London: Luzac and Co. Ltd., 1954), pp. 18 and 19, and S. Radhakrishnan, The Brahmā Sūtra: The Philosophy of Spiritual Life (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1960), p. 67.

of Śiva's cosmic dance, on the other hand, is traditionally associated with the more devotional or mystical aspect of Mūlar's teachings. Accordingly, the former verse is included in the Civañāna Cittiyār which has a philosophical and apologetic orientation, while the latter is given a central place in the Unmai Vilakkam, a more mystically oriented work which is written in the form of a dialogue between a guru and his disciple.[1] The one tends to bring out Mūlar's role as a mediator, the other tends to confirm his image as a yogī. Whether this division is deliberate or not is not clear, but what can be shown is that it does occur.

In the present study, I intend to challenge this way of dividing Mūlar's contribution by demonstrating that in the Tirumantiram, mythic references, in general, and dance imagery, in particular, also reflect the latter's talents as a mediator. In fact, I will argue that Mūlar's treatment of Śaiva lore (i.e., mythology) was inspired by his yogic insight. To support this thesis I will show (a) how Mūlar skillfully reworked Śaiva myths in order to awaken an understanding of Āgamic Śaivism in "its metaphysical, moral and mystical aspects,"[2] and (b) how he used that understanding to provide a basis for reconciling the supporters of the

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[1]One-fifth of the 54 verses of the Unmai Vilakkam deal with the mystic import of the Nādānta dance of Śiva.

[2]K. Śivaraman, Śaivism in a Philosophical Perspective (Delhi: Motilal Banarsidas, 1973), p. 31.

Vedic, Āgamic and Tamil bhakti cults. Stated another way, it is my contention that Mūlar's contributions as a mediator and as a yogī are not two separate contributions but are really one and the same. For it was by communicating his spiritual vision to diverse religious groups that he could hope to draw them into a religious association based on mutual acceptance and respect.

PREVIOUS STUDIES

Despite the great age of this Tamil treatise, the Tirumantiram was published only in the 20th century. The earliest printed publication was made available in 1912. Mr. M. V. Visvanatha Pillai, the editor-publisher of this volume, described it as the critical edition which had been culled from the available manuscripts. In 1942, and again in 1957, the Kalakam Publishers issued two separate editions of the Tirumantiram. Both contained notes provided by Tirumantiramani (A. Cidambaranar), but the later edition has been reorganized and exegeted by P. Ramanatha Pillai. The reason why this second version is not highly regarded by modern Śaiva scholars will be discussed shortly.

Other authoritative editions are those that have been produced by the Tirupapanandal Math (1951), the Madras Śaiva Siddhānta Mahāsamajam (19), by Dandapani Desikar (1959-1968) and by G. Varadarajan (1971-1974); the last two

providing valuable commentaries on each of the verses. Finally, there are a number of prose summaries and collections of selected verses available in Tamil and English, but at the present time no complete translation of the Tirumantiram has yet appeared in English or any other language.[1] As a result, this text has been studied by few Western scholars.[2] Outside of the Tamil commentaries, therefore, little has been written on the Tirumantiram in general and still less has been said about the significance of its mythic content in particular. Among the English speaking scholars, perhaps only M. A. Dorai Rangaswamy[3] and C. V. Narayana Ayyar[4] can be cited as individuals who have contributed to the task of elucidating the import of Śaiva myths included in the Tirumantiram. The former has done so by comparing Mūlar's treatment of several specific myths with that of the Tamil bhakti saint, Cuntarar. The latter

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[1]A complete English translation is being prepared by Dr. B. Natarajan and will be published by the Śaiva Siddhānta Church of Kapaa, Hawaii, but to date only one of the nine tantras has been published.

[2]One notable exception is Professor J. Filliozat. Between 1971 and 1978 Dr. Filliozat, professor of Indology at the College de France, has devoted a series of course lectures to a discussion of the Tirumantiram. These lectures have not been published but printed summaries of them are available from Professor Filliozat.

[3]Religion and Philosophy of the Tēvāram (Madras: University of Madras, 1958), vol. 2.

[4]Origin, ch. IX.

has contributed by interpreting several of Mūlar's mythic narratives in light of reflections presented in other verses of the treatise. In the present work, periodic references will be made to material drawn from both of these scholars.

ANALYSIS OF MYTH

While acknowledging my debt to Narayana Ayyar and Dorai Rangaswamy, I hope to make a further contribution to the study of the Tirumantiram by analyzing the pedagogical function of the mythic references contained in this treatise. Negatively, this means I will not be attempting a comparative study or structural analysis of the various myths. Positively, it means I will be concerned with demonstrating the appropriateness of the mythic medium as a vehicle for communicating Mūlar's conciliatory vision.

The mythic references incorporated in the Tirumantiram will be discussed under three separate headings which generally correspond to the way in which the mythic material is used in the text. First we will examine the apologetic function of the mythic references which appear in the pāyiram (preface). The term 'apologetic' is not to be taken in any polemical sense. Instead, it should be taken to refer to a kind of critical reflection on fundamental questions of the faith. The apologetic slant of the mythic material can be recognized in two ways: (a) when the context calls for a clarification of the philosophical or

metaphysical stance of Śaiva Siddhānta thought, (b) when the mythic figures utilized in the text are described as heavenly beings in relationship with Śiva who is presented as the One that sustains the many.

Under the second heading we will discuss the tropological function of mythic episodes incorporated into the main body of the text. Mythic references will be regarded as having a tropological function when it can be shown that the purpose of the narrative is to provide moral guidance and spiritual direction. In these verses, mythic figures (i.e., deities) are characterized not as lords of the heavens but as types of more or less devout souls that are still in the process of being purified.

Finally we will examine those mythic references which can be shown to have an anagogical function. Anagogical is an exegetical term which indicates that the material being discussed is to be understood in a mystical sense as distinct from any literal or moral interpretation. In the Tirumantiram, mythic material can be said to have an anagogical or mystical function (a) when mythic figures are described in relation to liberated devotees and (b) when the mythic imagery and the reality being referred to are contiguous as is the case when the drum held by the dancing Śiva is said to represent the śabda or sound that brings forth creation. Verses such as these

will be seen to stress the mystical realization of the love-filled truth that is Śiva.

There are several reasons for focusing attention on mythic material rather than on the more philosophical and esoteric portions of the Mūlar's treatise. First of all, the mythic imagery included in the Tirumantiram is valuable for discerning the nature of the horizon Mūlar had envisaged for reconciling the supporters of the Vedic, Āgamic and Tamil bhakti cults. In the hermeneutical philosophy of Hans-Georg Gadamer, a horizon designates "the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point."[1] In the Tirumantiram it is the language of myth that serves to disclose this horizon in a particularly graphic and holistic way.

Secondly, the writings of the Vedic, Āgamic and Tamil bhakti cults indicate that each had developed its own way of utilizing mythic material. It will be important, therefore, to see how Mūlar employed the mythic medium to reach various members of the Hindu community and to address the issues which divided them. Finally, my reading of the Tirumantiram has convinced me that the mythic references incorporated by Tirumūlar were designed to introduce on a popular level, the major themes that were reiterated on a

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[1] Truth and Method (New York: Seabury Press, 1975), p. 269.

more advanced level in the philosophical portions of the text.

DATING THE TEXT

The dating of India's sacred writings is a notoriously precarious task. With regard to South India, the difficulty involved in such an undertaking has been compounded by the uncertain state of chronology which prevailed until the turn of the century. In an article first published in 1891, P. Sundaram Pillay described the plight of the scholar of South Indian literature: "We have not, in fact, as yet, a single important date in the ancient history of the Dravidians (i.e., Tamils) ascertained and placed beyond the pale of controversy."[1]

In this same article, which was favorably received by the Royal Historical Society, Sundaram Pillay successfully fixed the age of the Śaiva Saint Tiruñāṉa Campantar and thus spearheaded subsequent breakthroughs in the area. The date of the latter was set at the middle of the 7th century (ca. 645-675). This enabled other scholars to

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[1] "Some Milestones in the History of Tamil Literature or The Age of Tirujñāna Sambandar", 1901. (Reprint from 1891 published by T. A. Society), p. 9. Surprisingly, in a Tamil article written some 80 years later by a leading contemporary Tamil scholar, this conclusion is reiterated. In this instance, however, it is cited not to question the dating of the Tēvāram hymnists as such, but to question their chronology relative to that of the Āḻvārs.

assign Cuntarar, the last of the Tēvāram writers, to the early 9th century (ca. 780-830). This determination is critical for settling the upper limit for the composition of the Tirumantiram, because it is in the Tiruttontattokai (Breviary of the Holy Servants) that we find the first literary reference to Tirumūlar. The single line dedicated to this Śaiva yogi reads as follows:

> Nampirāṉ Tirumūlaṉ aṭiyārkkum aṭiyeṉ
> I am the servant of our patron and Lord Tirumūlaṉ
> (Tēvāram 7.39.5)

Because the Tirumantiram itself provides no historical dates, describes no specific historical events and mentions no historical personages which would make it possible to pinpoint the time of its composition, this verse is especially important. For it establishes that Mūlar should not be placed later than the 9th century.[1] The same limit may be applied to the dating of the Tirumantiram despite

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[1] In his work on Cidambaramāhātmya, (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1970) Hermann Kulke notes that S. Graefe refuses to accept the Tirumūlar mentioned by Cuntarar as the author of the Tirumantiram because the former is described as a simple cowherd. "Graefe, S. bestreitet jedoch entschieden die Identität des Tirumulars aus dem Tiruttondattogai , eines frommen Kuhhirten, mit dem hochst gelehrten Verfasser des Tirumantirams." (p. 128, fn. 314). According to Kulke, Graefe finds it incredible that a pious cowherd could be such a learned composer. Thus she feels free to date Mūlar in the early 10th century. Graefe's error, however, lies in assuming that Cuntarar describes Mūlaṉ as a cowherd. This legend, as was discussed earlier, is not found in the Tiruttontattokai of Cuntarar but first occurs in the 10th-11th century Breviary of Nampi āṇṭār Nampi.

the fact that the work is not mentioned by Cuntarar. For the literary evidence discussed earlier,[1] strongly suggests that the author's name was derived from references to the word 'mūlan' which are found in the treatise itself but which do not designate a proper name. What this means is that 'Mūlar' is not the name of the sage himself but the name assigned to the sage as the author of the Tirumantiram.

This leaves us with the more difficult task of setting the lower limit. Fortunately, there are certain internal clues such as vocabulary, themes, images and geographical allusions which, when correlated with outside evidence that is datable, provide a basis for narrowing down the period of composition. For example, there is one verse in which it is stated that Śiva-jñānis (knowers of Śiva) traverse the five regions of the Tamil land. This mention of five regions (Tamil mantalam aintu) stands in marked contrast to the number specified in the early Tamil kingdoms - the Cēra mantalam, the Cōḷa mantalam and the Pantiya mantalam. Mūlar's passing reference to the existence of two additional mantalas suggests that there was a considerable lapse of time before the Tirumantiram was composed. If C. V. Narayana Ayyar is correct, and so far other scholars seem to agree, these additional mantalas can be identified as that of the Toṇtai (Pallava) and Koṅku. According to

[1] See above p. 9-11

Ayyar, both of these kingdoms would have been established sometime during the fourth century A.D. Since Tamil scholars assign the early Tamil poetry also known as Caṅkam* literature, to the first three centuries of the Christian era,[1] it can be said that the Tirumantiram is a post-Caṅkam work.

An argument in favor of a still later dating of the Tirumantiram pertains to the Sanskritic character of the work. Dandapani Desikar estimates that roughly fifty percent of the vocabulary is Sanskritic.[2] This provides an obvious contrast with the Caṅkam literature which is said to contain only two percent of Sanskrit words.[3] Inscriptions indicate that the incursion of Aryan dialects in the early centuries of the Christian era resulted in the promotion of Prakrit not Sanskrit. According to Professor J. Filliozat, it was only in the fourth century, under the influence of the early Pallavas that Sanskrit began to displace Prakrit as the language used in the royal court.[4] Moreover, it was only under the reign of the royal Pallavas of the early 7th century that dual inscriptions in Sanskrit and Tamil began to

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*Also written 'Saṅgam'.

[1]I. I. Pillay, A Social History of the Tamils (Madras: University of Madras, 1975), p. 106.

[2]"The Tenth Tirumurai: The Tirumantiram" Tevat Tamil (Divine Tamil), N. Sanjeevi, ed. (Madras: University of Madras), p. 193.

[3]J. V. Celliah, Pattuppāttu (Madras: the South India Saiva Siddhānta Works, 1962), p. 4.

[4]For further discussion of this point see article by J. Filliozat, "Tamil and Sanskrit in South India", Tamil Culture, vol. 26, p. 294.

appear.[1] The leading royal figure of this period was the Pallava Mahendravarman I (600-630) who was both a Sanskrit playwright and an acknowledged patron of Tamil culture. Considering the combination of Sanskrit and Tamil contained in Mūlar's treatise, it seems likely that the latter came from a period after the 5th century.

In general, Indian scholars tend to place Tirumūlar after the Caṅkam poets (i.e., after 300 A.D.) but before the appearance of the Tēvāram saints (i.e., prior to the 7th century).[2] Many of these scholars favor the 6th century because they regard the Tēvāram poets as having been influenced by Mūlar's ideas. This argument, however, has not been convincingly demonstrated. Western scholars, on the other hand, are inclined to date the Tirumantiram somewhat later. K. Zvelebil suggests the 7th century; J. N. Farquhar, the 8th; J. Filliozat posits the 7th or 8th and F. E. Hardy, the 9th or 10th c.

In the present study, I find myself siding with those who assign the Tirumantiram to the 7th-8th century. This would make the work contemporaneous with, or perhaps later than, the Tēvāram hymns of the Śaiva saints Appar and

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[1]Romila Thapar, A History of India (Middlesex, England: Penguin, 1966), vol. 1, pp. 169, 170.

[2]The following are a sampling of the various dates that have been suggested by Indian scholars: Murugesa Mudaliar - 4th, M. Arunachalam - 5th, C. V. Narayana Ayyar - 6th, Ramana Sastri - 6th, G. Subramaniya Pillai - not later than 6th century.

Campantar, but earlier than those of Cuntarar. I have arrived at this tentative position in light of the following considerations:

1. In several verses Mūlar draws attention to the fact that his mantras (stanzas) are being composed in Tamil. In one verse he explains with great enthusiasm how he came "to do (his work) in Tamil (TM 91). In another, he hints that Tamil śāstras had not been made available before this time (TM 97). Finally, in verse 86 this sage even recalls how he had come to appreciate 'Muttamil' (the threefold arts of Tamil culture). Historically, this kind of self-conscious promotion of the Tamil vernacular most clearly comes to the fore only at the time of the Tamil bhakti movement when the Tēvāram saints attack heterodox groups for their poor grasp of the Tamil tongue. As for the term 'Muttamil', M. Arunachalam has pointed out that this expression occurs rather late in the history of Tamil literature.[1] It is not found in the ancient Tamil grammar text of the Tolkāppiyam nor anywhere in the classical Caṅkam poetry. Significantly, the earliest known reference, outside of the Tirumantiram, appears in the song of Campantar; that is, in the 7th century.

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[1] "The Kaḷabhras in the Pāṇḍiya Country and Their Impact on the Life and Letters There", monograph reprinted from Journal of the Madras University, vol. 51, no. 1 (January, 1979), p. 85.

2. Of the three Tēvāram saints, Appar, Campantar and Cuntarar, it is the latter who seems to have been particularly influenced by Tirumūlar. Not only does he mention Mūlar by name but his self-conscious attempt to interpret the mythic material which he incorporates into his hymns is very much in line with the demythologizing and remythologizing we find in the Tirumantiram. If it could be shown that Cuntarar's more critical approach reflects a significant change in religious thinking and not just a difference in style from the earlier hymnists, then it could be an indication that Mūlar antedated Cuntarar but not Appar or Campantar.

Given the themes, issues and practices treated in the Tirumantiram, it can be said that we are looking for a period in South Indian history when the Tamil-speaking population had become familiar with a wide range of Aryan myths and legends, when Citamparam had become celebrated as the centre of the cult of the Nātarāj and Sanskrit Śaiva Āgamas were directing the temple cult, and when, under the influence of Tamil bhaktas,[1] the Tamil language was being promoted as a popular vehicle for theistic religious literature.

This was clearly the situation from the time of the Tēvāram saints onward, and it seems quite plausible that

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[1]Appar 129.4; Campantar 3.79.6; 3.57.10; Cuntarar 7.84.8; 7.100.8; 7.96.6.

the socio-religious climate of the 7th-8th centuries constituted the cultural milieu in which the Tirumantiram was composed. In any event, this time slot gives us a reasonably good idea of the religious environment in which, and the kind of audience for which, the text was written.

II. CULTURAL AND HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The seventh-eighth century was a time of religious and cultural revival in Tamil land. It signalled a time of renewed interest in and receptivity for elements drawn from two distinct cultures[1] - that of the native Tamil inhabitants and that of the Aryans who had migrated to the South prior to the Christian era. By the time the Tirumantiram was composed about the 7th century A.D., a pronounced religio-cultural synthesis of these two traditions had begun to emerge, a synthesis in which the followers of Śiva played an active and important role.

If we are to see how Mūlar's use of mythic material

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[1]Any reference to the Tamil culture as being distinctive, independent or autonomous should be understood in light of the following remarks of Professor X. S. Thani Nayagam:

> I am aware that the term 'cultural autonomy' is misleading and might suggest a complete absence of foreign impact. No culture of civilized people, especially of a sea-faring and commercial people is ever isolated. But if it be legitimate to speak of Rigvedic culture or Sanskrit culture or Greek culture... as separate autonomous, independent cultures, then it is equally legitimate to speak of the autonomous and independent Tamil culture of the Academy or Saṅgam period.

"Ancient Tamil Literature and the Study of Ancient Indian Education", in Tamil Culture, vol. 5, 1956, p. 10.

reflects his effort to mediate this interchange in a self-conscious and systematic way, then we must first have some understanding of the sophistication and complexity of the early Tamil society and of the kind of interaction which had developed between these traditions. Since this exchange has taken place from the earliest period of the South's recorded history, it will be helpful to consider three phases of early Tamil history which have been distinguished by the Indian historian K. A. Nilakanta Sastri.[1]

The first phase is generally known as the Caṅkam epoch (200 B.C.-300 A.D.). Our knowledge of this era comes from inscriptions, compilations of Caṅkam Tamil poetry which are characterized by a remarkable sensitivity for anthropological detail, and from foreign sources that corroborate the description provided by the Caṅkam poets. The second period dating from about 300-600 A.D. is more obscure. Thought to be a time when foreign rulers known as the Kalābhras overthrew native Tamil chieftains, it is not uncommonly referred to as the Kalābhra Interregnum. Records from this period are mainly Buddhist and Jain. For the third period which extends from 575-950 A.D. there are several significant sources, namely, inscriptions, architecture, Tamil religious poetry and Sanskritic literature.

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[1] A History of South India (London: Oxford University Press, 1955), pp. 2-4.

PERIOD ONE: THE CAṄKAM ERA

Tamil Identity

In the Caṅkam era, we find a complex society that is advanced politically, economically and culturally. Several factors influence the exchange which occurs between the Aryans and Tamils in this setting. First, the Tamils have a strong sense of their own identity which they retain even as they prove receptive to certain Northern ideas and practices. Secondly, their encounter with the North was of a social rather than a military nature and this enabled their native educators to mediate the various aspects of the Aryan incursion into the South. Thirdly, the earliest of incoming Aryans appear to have been willing to adapt to and learn from Tamil culture as well as to disseminate their own tradition.

Had the Aryan entrance into the South been more aggressive and the Tamil culture less highly developed, the mingling and merging of traditions may have left the Sanskritic tradition so dominant that there would have been no need for a mediator like Tirumūlar. As it was, several factors served to reinforce the sense of Tamil identity during the Cankam period.

A very basic factor was geographical. The Taṃils were deeply attached to their land which stretched from Vēṅkaṭam (modern Tirupati) in the north to Kanyākumari

(Cape Comorin) in the South, and was bounded east and west by the Bay of Bengal and the Arabian Sea respectively. Their bards and poets sang of its fivefold geophysical regions (tiṇai). They sang of its hills (kuriñci), forests (mullai), agricultural fields (marutam), minor arid tracts (pālai) and its coastal areas (neytal). To Northerners, this land was part of Dakṣiṇā pātha (the Southern side), but to the native inhabitants, it was Tamilakam - the abode of the Tamils!

A second factor which enhanced Tamil self-consciousness was political. From the onset of the historical period, Tamilakam was a country that was ruled by its own Tamil chieftains and super-chieftains or kings. Of these, the most renowned were the Cēras, Cōḷas and Pāṇṭiyaṉs whose Kingdoms tended to coincide with the natural divisions of the land. While the Cōḷas and Pāṇṭiyaṉs divided the land on the east coast, the Cēras controlled the region from the Western Ghats to the Malabar coast. That these dynasties were a source of pride for the Tamil population is evident in the early literature:

> The pleasant Tamil (speaking) lands possess
> For boundary the ocean wide,
> The heavens, where the tempests sway not
> Upon this brow rests a crown
> Fertile the soil they till and
> Three kings (mūvarullam) with mighty hosts
> This land divide.
>
> (Puram 35)

This pride was not unfounded. Aśokan inscriptions stemming from the latter half of the third century B.C. explicitly acknowledge the three Tamil Kingdoms as independent monarchies and as neighbours of the Mauryan Empire.[1] It is also known that Pāṇṭiyaṉ rulers sought to enter into alliance with Rome, and that Roman soldiers were enlisted in the armies of various Tamil kings.[2] Nor were these troops merely mercenaries. According to Tables believed to have been constructed about 226 A.D., some 840 to 1200 Roman soldiers had been sent to Muchiri, a city (now extinct) located on the west coast near the mouth of river Periyar, in order to protect the trading interests of their country.[3]

Trade was another important factor which strengthened the identity of the South. For even in this early period Tamils were engaged in large-scale maritime activity and could boast a number of major seaports such as Musiri, Toṇṭi, Korkai and Pukār, as well as properous inland cities such as Uraiyūr and Kuṭal (Maturai). In one such town like Pukār, the seaport capital of the Cōḷas, merchants could be seen arriving with a variety of goods. Some came from the Cēra land with peppers and sweet-smelling sandalwood,

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[1] Aśokan Rock Edicts II and XIII

[2] V. Kanakasabhai, The Tamils 1800 Years Ago (Tinnevely: The Śaiva Siddhānta Works Publishing Society, 1956) (first published 1885) p. 37.

[3] Ibid., p. 38.

with gems and gold from the South Sea, and still others with foodstuffs from Ceylon, and manufactured goods from Burma, etc. (Pattina, 210-220). The antiquity and fame of such cities has been further attested to by the fact that the chief towns and seaports and foreign merchandise of the Tamil country, as described in these poems correspond exactly with those given in the works of Pliny, Ptolemy and the Periplus Maris Erythraei.[1]

The Tamils could also be distinguished by their religious practices and beliefs. Aside from the evidence of spirit cults, ancestor worship and the honoring of minor deities which are thought to have been absorbed from the primitive pre-Tamilian inhabitants, the Caṅkam literature indicates that Tamils worshipped a number of deities, the chief ones being the goddess Korravai and the god Murukaṉ. The latter was the honored deity of the Tamils and was traditionally worshipped in the hill country (kuriñci) by shaman dancers known as Vēlans. After this cult entered into the larger towns and cities, Vēlans and devotees wearing kuriñci garlands could then be seen dancing in the streets and temple courtyards. (Maturai-kāñci. 671-78).

As important as these political, economic and religious factors were, there was one that was still more

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[1]These works were composed in the first and second century B.C. For excerpts, see Kanakasabhai, Tamils, p. 4.

significant in reinforcing Tamil identity. That was the cultural tradition promoted by the wandering bards and court poets. Actually, it was the cultural heritage popularized by these native educators that made the Tamil population conscious of the social, linquistic and religious bonds which united them. Even Tamil rulers of the Caṅkam age relied on the skills of the bards to culturally unite a land which remained divided politically.

As we examine the distinctive features of this bardic tradition which provide a basis for the subsequent resurgence of Tamil consciousness in the post-Kalābhra period, we will be gaining a clearer understanding of why Mūlar was able to distinguish the Tamil contribution to the development of Śaivism in the South. As we then proceed to discuss the mediating role of the bards and poets in relation to the dynamics of the Aryanization process that was occurring in the Tamil land, we will be particularly concerned with identifying those facets of the interaction that provided cultural support for the conciliatory stance taken by Mūlar in the Tirumantiram.

Distinctive Features of the Tamil Cultural Tradition

The cultural tradition in which the Tamil inhabitants had their roots was one which had been initially cultivated and preserved not by priests but by musically

skilled bards known as pāṇars who worked together with professional women dancers known as viṟalis. Since their primary function was to entertain the community, the threefold cultural arts developed by these bardic troupes consisted of poetry (iyal), music (icai), drama and dance (nāṭakam). These arts, which were practised together, came to be designated by the expression 'Muttamiḻ' (the threefold Tamil).

Although the performances had a distinctively secular flavor, drawing as they did on folktales and local history, they nevertheless seemed capable of provoking a type of participation and contagious spirit that was formerly associated with shamanistic rituals and mantic recitations. As S. Singaravelu explains:

> Dancers, both men and women formed an integral part of the ancient Tamil bardic troupes, for it was they who actively helped in bringing about what is now known as 'kinaesthetic process', i.e., the mental or emotional state of the singer was 'translated' deliberately into dancer's movements which when perceived by the onlooker aroused in him sensations of muscular sympathy, and these in turn associated themselves through memory with mental or emotional states which would have produced similar muscular effects in his own experience. Thus ideas were conveyed from the mind of the bard to that of his audience not only through the words of his songs but also through kinaesthesis brought about by the dancers of the bardic troup.[1]

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[1] Social Life of the Tamils (Malaysia: Marican and Sons Ltd., 1966), p. 2 fn. 6.

Thus the media were very much a part of the message in the tradition cultivated by the bards. This practice of involving the audience in such a way that they felt 'caught up' in the sentiments being expressed, would be taken over by the Tamil bhakti poets from the 6th to 9th century.

The bardic performances celebrated "the sentiments, emotions and the ordinary life of ordinary people, of the hunter of the hills, the shepherd of the plains, the fisherfolk by the sea, and young lovers everywhere.[1] They also promoted the achievements and aspirations of local chiefs and chieftains. Having acquired a firsthand knowledge of the social, economic, political, religious and physiological peculiarities of the well-defined regions of Tamilakam as they wandered from village to village in search of patrons, the bards and their poet successors became adept at generalizing and systematizing images and themes drawn from local cultures (the 'little traditions').

Their poetic compositions were characterized by a twofold division of reality into themes pertaining to the private 'inner' (akam) life associated with romantic love, and those relating to the public 'outer' (puram) life associated with heroic activity. This was a division that was not found in the Sanskritic literature of the period.

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[1] X. S. Thani Nayagam, "Ancient Tamil Literature and the Study of Ancient Indian Education," Tamil Culture, vol. 5, 1956, p. 14.

Under the heading of akam, the bards and poets dealt with the gamut of emotional encounters between lovers, their clandestine union, separation, moments of infidelity, sulking, waiting, etc. Stressing the originality of this genre, K. Zvelebil has remarked that akam poetry is based on a concept that is "broader and deeper than the Sanskritic kāma."[1] Another scholar of India, Professor V. Subramaniam elaborates on this point: "The Aryan literature of that age in India was either sacerdotal or philosophical or, when it talked of the relation between the sexes, it was either in terms of recondite romanticism or potency or progeny."[2]

Similarly, Professor X. S. Thani Nayagam,[3] George L. Hart,[4] K. Kailasapathy[5] and others have shown how the puram genre was inaugurated by native bards who were called upon to unite the Tamil community with tales of love and war. Puram verses included exhortations about righteousness, panegyrics and battle odes, and thus contained many of the elements associated with the Sanskrit terms artha (wealth, power) and dharma (law, virtue) combined.

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[1]The Smile of Murugan (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1973), p. 21.

[2]Cultural Integration in India (New Delhi: Ashish Publishing House, 1979), p. 49.

[3]"Ancient Tamil Poet-Educators," Tamil Culture, vol. 6, 1957, pp. 273-285.

[4]The Poems of Ancient Tamil (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1975).

[5]Tamil Heroic Poetry (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968).

Although it is easier to imagine how the akam genre could be adapted by the Śaiva bhakti poets to convey their moods of longing and intense emotional devotion to Śiva, it is important to recognize that puram was an integral part of the Tamil cultural tradition, and that it too provided a vehicle for communicating the saving deeds of the all-powerful Lord. The point to be stressed here, and which will be brought out later when we discuss Mūlar's understanding of the Tamil tradition is that the puram genre consistently celebrates the prowess or greatness of a ruler in relation to his graciousness. Verse after verse calls attention to this highly acclaimed virtue.

> O descendent of the mighty ones, who put beneath
> Their feet the wide extended earth...
> O mighty Ruler, listen to my song
> Who gives to frames of men the food
> They need, these give them life...
> (Puram 18)

The juxtapositioning of the traits of strength and generosity appears even more bluntly in the 42nd poem of the Puranānuru collection where the ruler is described as the: "Insatiate giver! and Lord of murderous war!"

So central was the motif of liberality that a special kind of Caṅkam lyric was developed to accommodate the bard's desire to inform other minstrels of the generous patrons which he himself had experienced. These songs, known as arrupatai or 'introduction' poems, are prominent in the Puram anthology. In the following excerpt we see the poet

Paranar 'introducing' a fellow supplicant to the generosity of the ruler Pēkaṉ.

> O supplicant, who with thy troupe are wan
> with hunger's pangs, you ask me who I am...
> Before I saw the king my state was worse
> than thine...
> Pēkaṉ, the lord of elephants and steeds
> Gives, for to give with lavish hand is good!
> (Puṟam 141)

The Cōḷa King Kari apparently was so liberal with his gifts that his court poet Kapilar felt compelled to admonish him to be more discriminating and to desist from viewing "each suppliant bard with undistinguishing regard."[1] Nor does this virtue become any less important in the late Caṅkam Guide Poem to Murukaṉ (the Tirumurukaṟṟuppaṭai). In this composition, the author proceeds to direct devotees to various shrines of the Tamil deity Murukaṉ which were scattered throughout the southern region. He urges them upon arrival at the site, to entreat the deity in the following way:

> "Exalted god, this is a suppliant
> Who many sweet delightful songs does sing
> To please those who desire to hear thy praise
> So he deserves protection from thy grace"...
> To which the Lord will reply
> In choice and loving words:
> "Remove thy fear, I know thy quest."
> (Tirumurukaṟṟuppaṭai: 403-406; and 412-413)

The motif will be given further impetus by the Śaiva bhakti leaders, the Nāyaṉārs, who, thinking of themselves as minstrels of the Lord, wander from shrine to shrine

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[1] Puṟam 121.

singing of the gracious patronage of Śiva. In this way, despite the shift in emphasis from the king to the deity, we find that the notions of graciousness (aḷiyan), liberality (vaḷḷal) and love (aṉpu) remain prominent and continue to characterize the Tamil cultural tradition in the seventh, eighth and ninth centuries A.D.

In general then, the Tamil cultural tradition was characterized by the threefold arts of music, song and dance which had been developed to express the complementary themes of romantic love and gracious heroism. Religious rituals and imagery played an important part in the cultural life of the Tamils, but they were not the central concerns of the bards and poets who were the bearers of the Tamil culture during the Caṅkam era. It was the humanistic elements that were highly developed, not the religious institutions which remained basically spontaneous and without any elaborate theological underpinning. This humanistic emphasis, which is especially evident in the worldview that underlies and unites the individual features of the Tamil tradition described above, is important to explore because it further specifies the uniqueness of the Tamil contribution to the resurgence of national sentiment several centuries later.

The Tamil Worldview. The worldview which informs the early Caṅkam anthologies is distinctive in that it reflects

the anthropocentric character of the early Tamil society. According to X. S. Thani Nayagam,[1] K. Kailasapathy[2] and others, the cultural outlook of the Tamils was developed at a time when regional communities were being subdivided into numerous villages with chiefs and super-chieftains presiding over one or more of them. At this stage in its evolution, the southern society not only began to focus attention on military exploits and on the ambitions and achievements of individual leaders, but it began to rely more and more on bards and minstrels to record its victories, motivate its warriors and honor its heroes with dramatic tales of love (akam) and war (puram).

The idealized figure of this martial society was the learned warrior-lover who took charge of 'world' events. He was a leader who was aware of himself as an agent of history; that is, as one responsible for the destiny of his own chieftaincy. In fact, it would be difficult to find a clearer statement of this worldly, self-sufficient anthropocentric outlook of the early Tamil society than that provided by one such learned ruler, the poet-king Nedunjelian:

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[1] "The Educators of Early Tamil Society," Tamil Culture, vol. 5, 1956, pp. 105-119.

[2] Tamil Heroic Poetry, pp. 73ff.

Those that deserve to be scorned by me
Have, without fear of valour, spoken in derision
Of my land, called me a boy, and said
That I do not possess tall elephants...
If I do not fight these kings in a terrible fight
And capture them and their drums, the people
Who live under the shade of my umbrella,
Not finding shelter, will shed tears and call
Me a worthless king, and I will deserve
Such reproach. Then may the poets, famous
Throughout the world,...no more sing about me.
(Puram 72)

...That fool who mocks my purpose
Not heeding the strength of the mighty
Is like a blind man stumbling on a tiger
...If I do not go, fight him,
And make him suffer...
Then may my garland wither
In the unresponsive embraces of women
With black hair who have no love
In their faultless hearts.
(Puram 73, Hart's trans.)

The anthropocentric worldview which finds expression in these verses stands in marked contrast to the mythological weltanschauung that is evident in the Sanskrit works of the Aryans where the struggles of earthly life are approached from a cosmic perspective. As K. Zvelebil writes: "The Tamil classical poetry is pre-eminently of this world; it makes almost no allusions to supernatural meddling in worldly affairs."[1] In this respect, in particular, the difference between the Tamil and the Aryan traditions is striking. In the Caṅkam works, one finds cosmic imagery:

[1]The Smile of Murukan, p. 20.

> Thou art the chief, O mighty one!
> Whether the resplendent sun in diverse
> quarters does rise
> Or whether the silvery planet to the
> south declines,
> Still thy land shall flourish...
> (Puram 35.)

In the Sanskrit Vedas and Purāṇas, it is cosmic mythology that dominates:

> I will extol the most heroic Indra (deity of
> thunder and lightning)
> Who with his might, forced earth and sky
> asunder.
> (R.V. 10,139,1)

Again, while the South associated natural phenomena such as rains, fertility and health with the righteous conduct of the king, the North thought of these same phenomena as being secured by the proper performance of sacrifices which were rooted in elaborate mythologies, and carried out by Brahmin priests.[1] The worldview of the latter was mediated by priestly categories, in particular by mythic language and imagery. This point is brought out in R. N. Dandekar's observations regarding the Vedic texts that were preserved by the Brahmin priests:

> (the Rig) Veda is primarily occupied with
> mythology rather than with theology. To put
> it in other words, most of the Rigvedic gods
> appear to have been created for the myths, and
> not the myths for the gods. The Rigvedic

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[1]G. L. Hart, The Relation Between Tamil and Classical Sanskrit Literature (Weisbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1976), p. 335.

> religion is directly dependent on myths. The myth is the primary and unique mode of apprehending reality...[1]

By contrast, the Tamil worldview was qualified by basically humanistic insights and folk motifs in which nature rather than myth provided the primary symbols for expressing a cohesive view of life. Even the religious traditions of the Tamils appear to have been free of any full-blown mythological narratives. F. W. Clothey in his recent study[2] has demonstrated this with regard to the cult of the chief South Indian deity, Murukan. Having examined the early and late Caṅkam works in light of the archeological research done on the prehistorical period of South India, Clothey has identified three phases in the development of the Murukan cult, which underscore the subdued character and the minor role of mythological imagery in the Tamil outlook.

In the first phase where the worship of the deity is pre-Aryan in character, references to Murukan yield but a single myth-like motif. They allude to the existence of a malevolent demon cur who haunts the hills and who is destroyed by Murukan initially with a shining sharp leaf

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[1] R. N. Dandekar, God in Hindu Thought, Reprint from the Annals of the Bhandarkar Oriental Research Institute Golden Jubilee Volume, 1968, pp. 433-465 (Poona: University of Poona, 1968), p. 435.

[2] The Many Faces of Murukan (The Hague: Mouton Publishers, 1978), chapters 2 and 3.

(akam 59), and later with a leaf-shaped lance. With the exception of this modest narrative which will be elaborated into a mythic episode some centuries later, the Cankam works show a clear preference for legendary or folk material. Thus one finds that, for the most part, Murukan is associated with the tribes who inherited the hills, and is said to have married Valli, a maid of the hill tribe. As 'Lord of the Hill,' he is thought to reflect the beauty, strength and youthfulness of nature, and is worshipped as the provider of vegetation, the bestower of rain and as the source of fertility. Though his divine power or anaṅku is seen as threatening enemies, periodically possessing shamans (Vēlan), and as being invoked by lovers to witness to their oaths of fidelity, it is not celebrated in any mythological context.

In the second or intermediate phase which coincides with the movement of this cult into the more settled urban areas, some of the above motifs are universalized; but there appears to be no further elaboration of the Murukan-Cur encounter. Nor is any mythological genealogy associated with Murukan at this point.

It is only in the third stage of development, after the South has experienced a period of intense Aryanization or Sanskritization,[1] that this native son becomes known as

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[1]This term, first coined by M. N. Srinivas is used here to refer to the process of spreading Sanskritic

Skanda, the six-headed offspring of Śiva, and subsequently acquires a mythological heritage drawn from Sanskrit sources.[1]

Without belabouring this distinction between the Tamil and Aryan outlooks, one further example should suffice to demonstrate the former's preference for legend over myth. This can be seen in the poet's treatment of the deity Tirumāl. Although the Tamil grammarian Tolkāppiyar identified Māl with Viṣṇu, the term Viṣṇu does not occur in any of the Caṅkam texts. The opening lines of one of the

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Hinduism, that is, the Sanskrit scriptures, rituals, myths, customs and ideas preserved by Brahmins. For further explanation of this term see Milton Singer, When A Great Tradition Modernizes (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1972), pp. 43-51; 260-262.

[1]Allusion to the sanmukha (six-faced) deity occurs in the Taittirīya Āraṇyaka, and a fuller myth is found in Mahābhārata III 223-232; IX 46-47; XIII 84-86. The first references to this mythological genealogy in Tamil literature occur in the verses of the Paripāṭal (A.D. 4th-5th) and the Tirumurukarrupaṭai (A.D. 3rd, 7th?) Cilappatikāram (4th-5th).

> "In order to prepare a path on the mountain,
> O Lord of six tender heads,
> You took birth in the lotus, O one of six
> tender heads, (with) twelve arms like
> drums
> Beauty of the color of the sun." (Pari. 10-13)

And in Tirumurukarrupaṭai (361-364):

> "O Blessed One whose forms are six: Thou born
> of women six and taken up in the palms
> Of one of the five (elements) in meadow
> overgrown
> With Kusa's grass on the summits of the
> Himalayas."

Tamil Idylls[1] do ascribe Viṣṇu's insignia of the conchshell and discus to Māl, but it is in the Akam verse that we see the South's preference for legend over myth. In the Akam verse, it is the Kṛṣṇa-like folk image of the deity that predominates when the poet narrates how this Lord of the mullai (pastoral) district pressed down the branch of a tree with his foot and bent the branch so that the cowherdesses bathing in the river could clothe themselves with cool leaves.[2] Since this legend is not found in any Sanskrit source, it provides a clear indication of the Tamil style.

Seeing that mythological imagery and mythological thought were relatively foreign to the South and played only a minor role in the indigenous religious and cultural tradition of the Tamils, the question arises as to why Tirumūlar, who was writing for a Tamil-speaking population, should have chosen to employ mythic material to kindle a deeper understanding of Śaivism. To gain some insight into this

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[1] Mullaipāttu 1-6. Here no myth is elaborated, rather the mythic imagery associated with Visnu is used as a simile to describe the clouds arising over the mullai region:

> "From clouds that travel fast with water drunk
> From the cold, resounding sea, and rise from
> the hills
> ...Like Viṣṇu who bears
> In mighty hands the disc and right-whorled
> chank..."

[2] Akam 59

move, it is necessary to consider how Tamils responded to the mythic lore of the incoming Aryans. For our purposes this can be achieved by analyzing the way in which Northern mythic imagery was incorporated into the Caṅkam literature, and then by comparing these particularly Tamil solutions with those found in the Tirumantiram.

Incorporation of Aryan Mythology: an Anthropocentric approach. The first thing to be noted about the early Tamil anthologies[1] is the fact that they contain comparatively few mythic allusions to either Aryan or South Indian deities. After surveying the Akam and Puram collections which contain 400 poems each, P. T. Srinivasa Iyengar has collected only about twelve such references.[2] The deities and avatāras described include Kṛṣṇa, Balarāma, Rāma, Parasurāma and Śiva; the latter deity being mentioned six times in all.[3] Reading the descriptions provided in these selections, it is not difficult to see that the mythic material has been skillfully adapted to serve the needs of the more secular or anthropocentric society of the South.

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[1]Those collections and writings which are considered late Caṅkam (i.e., post 3rd century A.D.) are the Kalittokai, Paripāṭal and Tirumurukāṟṟupaṭai besides the epics of the Cilappatikāram and the Maṇimēkalai.

[2]History of the Tamils From the Earliest Times to 600 A.D. (Madras: Coomaraswamy Naidu Sons, 1929), pp. 463-467.

[3]Akam 181.
Puram 6, 55-56, 91, 166.

One way of accomplishing this was by transforming mythic references into similes and then applying the latter to earthly warriors and warrior-lovers. An example of this is found in one Puram verse where the poet praises the Cōla and Pāṇṭiya kings as being:

> Majestic like the two gods standing together,
> One of whom is white and holds the palm flags
> (i.e., Baladeva)
> And the other of dark hue who carries the
> wheel (i.e., Krsna)
> (Puram 58)

Allusions to Śiva and Śaiva mythology are similarly worked into similes used to eulogize local rulers. The poetess Auvvaiyar blesses her respected patron-king with the words: "May you be eminent forever as the matchless Lord (Śiva) whose throat is blue and who wears the silvery crescent on his head" (Puram 91). In an extended simile, the Pāṇṭiyan king Nan-Maran is showered with myth-evoking epithets:

> (In wrath thou art like) Him (i.e., Śiva) who
> is riding
> On a strong bull, his matted locks blazing
> Like fire, the invincible battle axe
> And a throat like the blue gem,
> (In strength thou art like) him (i.e.,
> Balarama) whose body
> Wields the death-desiring plough and has
> the palmyra flag
> (in fame like) him (i.e., Viṣṇu) whose body
> is the color of the well-washed sapphire
> And who raises aloft to the sky, the bird flag.
> (In competence like) him (i.e., Murukan) who
> holds up
> The gem-like peacock flag, who is always
> victorious,
> Rides the peacock and is bright red.
> (Puram 56, 1-8)

Again, in Puram 55 the kingdom of the Pāṇṭiyaṉ ruler is compared to the third eye of the One (i.e., Śiva) who destroys the three fortress cities; the implication being that the kingdoms of the Cēras and the Cōḻas were like the two lower eyes of Śiva subordinate to the former. In these similes, it can be seen that the underlying mythic narratives have been 'telescoped' into succinct epithets. Since this practice comes to distinguish the Tamil hymns of the Śaiva bhakti Saints, it may be said to characterize the South's approach to myth. Given the elaborate, detailed accounts of these myths which are set forth in the Sanskrit Epics and Purāṇas, it is not insignificant that the Tirumantiram incorporates, instead, the more abbreviated forms of the mythic episodes which accord with Tamil practice.

Examining the above similes, it can also be seen that the Aryan mythology has been adapted to focus attention on the king. Only those details are included which enhance the status of the king. Now such selectivity in working with mythic material indicates a certain detachment and sophistication on the part of the Tamil poets. As one scholar puts it, the Caṅkam literature portrays a people "who know something of the myths of Northern India, but only from a distance, and without seeming to believe in them."[1]

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[1]Pierre Meile, "Mythology of the Tamils," in

While it does not follow that such incredulity or sophistication would have been widespread among the general population, it does point to the likelihood that a portion of the educated members of the Tamil society would have been similarly detached from the mythic worldview and its imagery. This, too, will have to be taken into consideration later when we discuss the kinds of groups for whom the Tirumantiram was intended.

Mythic descriptions of deities are actually quite sparse in the early Tamil anthologies. Of those which have been incorporated, however, the bulk appears to fall under one of the two categories. Having examined the anthropocentric approach and its implications, we have yet to explore the second 'nature-oriented' approach, and see how this can provide a basis for assessing Mūlar's pedagogical sensitivity to the cultural background of the Tamils.

Incorporation of Aryan Mythology: a Nature-Oriented approach. The second approach may be termed 'nature-oriented' because it involves the technique of weaving mythic allusions into descriptions of the Southern landscape. It, too, has a distinctively Tamil character. It derives from the bardic practice of honoring patron-kings with glowing

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Larousse World Mythology, Pierre Grimal, ed. (New York: Prometheus Press, 1963), pp. 267-269 sp. p. 268.

accounts of the natural beauty and vitality of the different regions ruled by these leaders. It also reflects a situation where nature rather than myth provided the background for co-ordinating the various facets of life - social, economic, political and religious. In keeping with these conventions, the cosmic imagery of the Aryans was brought down to earth, so to speak, by the process of associating particular mythic references with specific geographical settings within the confines of Tamilakam. A clear example of this occurs in one of the Idylls where the cosmological myth pertaining to the Creator-god's birth from the navel of Viṣṇu is transformed into a simile for describing the greatness of the northern Tamil city of Kāñci.

> The city shines
> Like fair seed vessels of the lotus bloom
> That many-petalled springs
> From the navel of the dark-skinned Netiyōṉ
> (i.e., Viṣṇu),
> From whom was born the four-faced god
> (i.e., Brahmā)
> (Perum. 467-471)

In the same work we find another example where the great cosmic myth retelling Viṣṇu's majestic repose on the body of the serpent Śeṣa which floats on the vast ocean, is incorporated by the Caṅkam poet as the description of a shrine located in the suburb of Kāñci. Here the mythic image is simply woven into the more natural, realistic language

and motifs of the verse.[1]

> Then crossing foreign town...thou'lt reach
> Tiruveha town
> Where lives the god that sleeps on a serpent
> bed
> Much like an elephant that on a hill
> Reclines, on which long kāntal clusters
> grow.
>
> (Perum. 426,429-431)

The situation is similar in the case of Śiva. In one of the Puram verses which acknowledges Śiva, reference to the mythic imagery of the three-eyed Lord (i.e., Śiva) actually calls attention to a local temple site. The poet simply notes that "the king's umbrella (a sign of his authority) is lowered only when circumambulating the temple of the three-eyed God (Śiva)."[2] In Akam 181, the same mythic image of the three-eyed deity who scorched the god of desire (kāma) is found. The only difference here is that instead of a shrine or temple occasioning the reference, it is the mention of the banyan tree which is the locus of Śiva's manifestation as Guru.

> Pukār belongs to the prosperous kings who
> desire revenue from (goods landed on) the
> expansive seashore where spread white sands
> heaped up...In this town, surrounded by
> tanks, brides beautify the yard under the
> banyan tree of the three-eyed Lord of the
> ancient books of the four Vedas whose

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[1] It is interesting to note that in the later Sanskrit works which have been influenced by the literary conventions of the Tamils, the reverse occurs. That is, nature imagery derived from the South is worked into verses describing mythological figures. See G. L. Hart, Relation, pp. 332 ff.

[2] Puram 6.

> blessed sounds spread throughout the world,
> and make images with their hands and drop
> them in the water.
>
> (Akam 181.11-20)

This approach may be contrasted with that found in the Vedas, Epics and the Purāṇas. In the Vedas, for example, manifestations of the Ultimate are described as being cosmic and all-pervasive. If the object of the cult is thought to be localized at all, it is in terms of being present to the sacrifice wherever the latter is being performed. Nor do the Purāṇas show any special interest in specifying the locus of various theophanies. Where Kṛṣṇa is born or where Viṣṇu appears is incidental. What comes across as being more important to the authors of these Sanskrit works is that they are able to stress how the avatāras or appearances of the deity coincide with periods of social crisis which arise not once and for all, but throughout the yugas. In fact, the purpose of presenting the deity in mythological language seems to be to transcend the limitations imposed by both space and time. While the Tamil perception of the divine cannot be said to have been any less universal,[1] it nevertheless

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[1]The term kaṭavuḷ which the Tamils used to designate the Supreme force, as well as to denote particular gods comes from the root kaṭa meaning to surpass or transcend, and the suffix uḷ which designates immanence. Thus the notions of both transcendence and immanence seem to be conveyed in a single term. This word occurs in many of the

retained a particular sensitivity and attachment for the place where the deity had descended and entered into contact with his or her devotee.

This is especially evident in the bhakti period when the humanistic poetry of the Tamil bards gives way to the religious poetry of the Tamil saints, this practice of associating a given manifestation of a deity with a particular geographical site becomes even more prominent. It is not surprising then that by the time the Tirumantiram was composed, a number of mythic episodes had become identified with specific shrines or towns located within the boundaries of Tamilakam. Of these, eight acquire a special prominance in the South.[1] The eight include: 1) Tripurāntaka, Śiva's destruction of the three cities of the enemy asuras; 2) Dakṣāri, Śiva's destruction of Dakṣa's sacrifice; 3) Kāmāntaka, his scorching of Kāma with his third eye; 4) Gajaha, his killing of the elephant sent to attack him by the ṛsis of Daṇḍakaraṇya; 5) Jalandhāri, his defeat of the demon Jalandhara with a discus; 6) Kālasamhāra, Śiva's battle with Yama, the Lord of death; 7) Andhakāri, Śiva's conquering of Andhaka, an enemy of the devas; and 8) Brahmaśiraśchedana, Śiva's cutting off of the fifth head of Brahmā as a punishment for his pride.

The popularity of these particular myths is attested

Caṅkam works; for example, see Puṟam 106.335; Naṟṟi. 34,165; Aiṅkuru. 182, 243; Kal.: 46,16; TM 13; also see below p.189.

[1]Dorai Rangaswamy, Religion and Philosophy, Vol.I, p. 180.

by the fact that Appar and Cuntarar refer to them in Tamil as aṭṭavīrattas (the eight heroic deeds).[1] The specifically Tamil acceptance of them is indicated by the fact that they were described in relation to various southern shrines by both the Nāyaṉārs and the subsequent tradition. The latter is specially emphatic in holding that Śiva performed these eight deeds in eight particular towns of Tamilakam;[2] this despite the fact that each narrative can be traced to a northern Sanskritic source.[3]

Dorai Rangaswamy has suggested that the correlation between northern mythology and southern geography was probably influenced by the presence of stucco representations of individual episodes found on the wall of shrines in different Tamil villages.[4] Whatever the impetus for making the association, it should be noted that these links are useful for determining which of the numerous Aryan myths had come to be favored by the Tamils.

Because it will be argued that Mūlar was not attempting to introduce or popularize Śiva lore, but to foster a more critical understanding of myths which were already well known and taken for granted, it will be important to

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[1] Ibid.

[2] Atikai, Pariyal, Kuṟukkai, Vaḻuvūr, Virkuṭi, Kaṭavūr, Koval and Kaṇṭi respectively.

[3] For list of Sanskritic sources, see Dorai Rangaswamy, Religion and Philosophy, vol. I, pp. 304-372.

[4] Ibid. p. 354.

explore the kinds of myths which are incorporated in the Tirumantiram. This will be done in a later chapter where we will assess the prominence given to the aṭṭavīrattas and to other mythic episodes such as the fiery liṅgam and the cosmic dance of Śiva which are also stressed in the Tēvāram hymns.

So far in our survey of the Caṅkam period we have emphasized those elements which made it possible to distinguish the cultural tradition of the Tamils from that of the Aryans. We have also indicated the ways in which the Tirumantiram can be related to the bardic tradition of Muttamil, the literary conventions of akam and puram poetry, the anthropocentric and nature-oriented character of the Tamil worldview, and lastly, the nature of the Tamil response to northern myths and mythological imagery. In the next section, we will conclude our study of the Caṅkam period with an examination of the religious and cultural bonds that were developing between Tamil rulers and Aryan Brahmins. This will provide a general framework for discussing why Mūlar and the Śaiva bhakti saints had been so disposed to link the Tamil and Sanskrit (i.e., Brahmanical) traditions, and to stress the greatness of both.

Linking the Tamil and Sanskritic Traditions

The religious climate of Tamilakam during the Caṅkam era was characterized by great diversity and tolerance. As such, it was conducive to the peaceful mingling of Northern beliefs and practices with those of the South. In larger towns, for example, one could find those who worshipped Viṣṇu as well as Murukaṉ and Koṟṟavai, Brahmins reciting the Vedas, and Jain and Buddhist monks receiving devotees in their garden dwellings.

Of the various Aryan groups known to have been active in the South at this time, however, it appears that the Brahmins had become more influential with Tamil rulers than had either the Buddhists or Jains. One indication of this is the fact that references to these heterodox groups are extremely sparse in early Tamil literature. As J. R. Marr observes: "There is but small evidence of beliefs of the latter in the eight anthologies, and no reference is made to them by name."[1] To account for the difference in the cultural and political impact of these Aryan groups, the South Indian archeologist Krishna Sastri has rather timidly suggested that "perhaps the South Indian Kings of those times were

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[1]J. R. Marr, "The Eight Tamil Anthologies with Special Reference to Puṟanāṉuru and Patiṟṟuppāṭṭu," (thesis approved for the doctorate in Philosophy, University of London, 1958), p. 475.

more inclined toward Brahmanical institutions than Buddhist or Jaina."[1]

Support for such a suggestion comes from K. N. Sivaraja Pillai who calls attention to the kinds of Brahmins that were active in the South. Earlier, F. E. Pargiter in his work on the Ancient Indian Historical Tradition, had identified three general classes of Brahmins:

1. The ascetic devotee and teacher, the rishi or the muni;
2. The priest and the spiritual guide of kings, nobles and people;
3. The minister of State, Royal Officer and those who followed secular employments.[2]

Referring to this classification, Sivaraja Pillai writes: "In the Tamil country the earliest Brahmin settlers as testified to in literature seem to have belonged to the second class."[3] Although this statement needs to be qualified since there are some Caṅkam references to Brahmins which seem to fit the description of the first[4] and third[5]

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[1]Quoted by K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, The Pandiyan Kingdom (London: Luzac & C9., 1929), p. 16.

[2]Quoted by K. N. Sivaraja Pillai, Agastya in the Tamil Land (Madras: University of Madras), pp. 30-31.

[3]Ibid. p. 31.

[4]"Munis (munivar) tend their fires unquenched," Perumpanarruppatai, 583,584.

[5]E.g., in the twenty-fourth poem of the Akam collection, the expression 'vēlap pārppan' is used to refer to those Brahmins who do not perform sacrifices (vēl).

categories, it can be said that the greater number of southern Brahmins appear to have been either priests or spiritual advisors of the Tamil rulers and upper classes. This can be seen by the way Brahmins are described in the Akam and Puram collections.

In both of these anthologies, the terms used to designate Brahmins are pārppan[1] and antanar.[2] The former occurs four times in the Puram verses and ten times in the Akam verses, while the latter is used about ten times in both. Having examined these works, P. T. Srinivasa Iyengar[3] observes that it is the exceptional reference that does not make mention of their Vedic scholarship, their chanting, triple sacrificial fires, or their performance of the sacrifice. Their priestly character is clearly brought out in Puram 166 where the Brahmin Viṉṉandayam is eulogized as a wearer of the sacred thread, a performer of the twenty-one (Vedic) sacrifices, a knower of the fourfold Veda which has six limbs and as one who is generous with his offerings of ghee (heated butter).

The alliance between these bearers of the Aryan culture and the Tamil kings is made explicit in a number of verses which celebrate the latter as patrons of the Vedic

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[1] Pārppan, meaning the 'seers' from pār - to see.

[2] According to folk etymology, antanar means 'those who are lovely' (an) and cool (tan).

[3] Iyengar, History, pp. 217-218.

cult. For example, we find the Pāṇṭiyaṉ king Muṭi Kuṭumi hailed as Palyāgasālai, i.e., the builder of sacrificial halls.[1] The Cōḷa king Perunarkilli is even said to have performed the Rājasūya, the great Vedic sacrifice as a prelude to accepting an Aryan-style coronation.[2] And the renowned Cōḷa Karikāla was remembered as one who performed the Vedic sacrifice in the assembly of the great, noted for its knowledge of Dharma, which was guided by priests learned in their duties...[3]

At the same time, the Tamil kings are linked to the great Kshatriya tradition of the North as their activities are shown to resemble legendary and mythological events recorded in the great Sanskritic epics of the Mahābhārata and Rāmāyaṇa. More than one Tamil king was urged to be compassionate even as was their supposed ancestor King Sibi who gave his own flesh to save the life of a dove (Mbh. Vana Parva; Puram 39, 46). Elsewhere, a righteous Pāṇṭiyaṉ king is likened to 'the one (i.e., Śiva) with the fiery eye who attacked the three forts using the towering mountain as his bow and the snake as its string' (Mbh. Karṇa Parva; Puram 55). In yet another verse, the Cēra king Uṭiyaṉ is

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[1]Many are the broad sacrificial halls/where were performed great sacrifices/in which famous fire-offerings and ghee were burnt in the fire/in accordance with the (decrees)/ of the faultless books of the four Vedas. (Puram 15, 16-21).

[2]Puram 16.

[3]Puram 224.

praised for having distributed large quantities of rice in conjunction with a dramatization of the great Bhārata Battle between the Pāṇḍavas and the Kauravas.[1] (Puram 2; Cilap. 29.2). These verses suggest a strong religious and cultural bond existed between the spiritual and temporal leaders in Tamilakam. Later, when we examine the development of the Agastya legend/myth in the South, we will show how Mūlar stresses the value of the spiritual heritage that is held in common.

The bond between the Tamils and the Aryan Brahmins received support from other important segments of the Southern society. One such group was the influential class of Tamil merchants. For in at least one account of life in the seaport capital of Pukār, they are described as individuals who

> do their duties for the immortals (amarar)
> offer oblations (avuti; Skt. havis),
> tend with care fine bulls and cows,
> exalt those learned in the four Vedas (nanmaraiyor)
> offer food to guests and
> unstintingly give alms.
> (Pattina. 235-240)

Taken together, these various passages make it clear that there were Aryan Brahmins in Tamilakam, that they were

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[1] P. T. Srinivasa Iyengar explains that this legend has frequently been misinterpreted to mean that Uṭiyan fed the Pandavas and Kauravas themselves, whereas it seems that this is a reference to a dramatic enactment of the event at the conclusion of which all are fed. History of the Tamils from the Earliest Times to 600 A.D., pp.493-494.

priestly and orthodox,[1] and that the Brahmanical tradition was finding acceptance among the native Tamil rulers and other significant groups in the Tamil society. In short, this can be said to signal the early stages of what scholars refer to as the process of Aryanization or Sanskritization.[2]

Given the favorable conditions under which the alliance was formed, it is rather obvious why the Sanskritic tradition of the Brahmins came to be respected and promoted in the South. What this account does not explain, however, is why the Tamil tradition was able to withstand the growing influence of the Brahmins such that it was able to retain its integrity well into the bhakti period at which time it was celebrated by Mūlar and others as being on par with that of the North.

Here it should be noted that the tenacity of the non-Sanskritic cultural tradition is not something Indian historians take for granted, for it is not a usual occurrence. Even K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, who is ordinarily inclined to attribute most cultural breakthroughs in South India to Sanskritic influence, was sufficiently moved by the exceptional nature of the outcome of the South's early

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[1] In several places their duties are described as being sixfold, and the enumeration given corresponds exactly with those recorded in Manu 10,75. See Patir. 24, Tirumurukarrupatai, Śilappatikāram.

[2] Term described above, p.18, fn. 1.

encounter with the North to acknowledge that "the persistent independence of the Tamil idiom...in face of Sanskrit is in striking contrast with the almost total disappearance of non-Sanskritic vernacular in the North of India."[1] He further concedes that there is a need to consider "whether the blending of the Aryan with the pre-Aryan culture was in essence a different process in the South from what it was in Northern India."[2]

By way of response to Sastri's rhetorical query, I suggest that the uniqueness of the Tamil situation was due, in large part, to the fact that the South's encounter with the North was of a social rather than a military nature. This meant there was no major disruption of the society and no sudden displacement of native educators as there would have been, had Brahmins entered the Tamil land on the heels of the invading armies. Instead, the intrusion of Aryan culture, in general, and the Brahmanical tradition in particular, was gradual and was initially mediated by the native bards (pāṉar) and poets (pulavar). (One example of this was the Caṅkam's reworking of Aryan myths). In these circumstances, the interaction became mutual. This means that not only did Tamil rulers support Brahmanical institutions, and Tamil poets incorporate Northern material into the bardic heritage, but many of the incoming Brahmins

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[1] The Pandiyan Kingdom, p. 2.

[2] Ibid.

can be seen to have been significantly influenced by the cultural traditions of the Tamils.

P. T. Srinivasa Iyengar[1] and G. C. Hart[2] in their works point out several ways in which these Aryan leaders have adapted to the Southern situation with regard to certain cultic practices[3] but here I want to focus on the most outstanding example of Brahmanical acceptance of Tamil culture; namely, the latter's acceptance of the literary tradition of the bards. Having already mentioned that the greater number of Brahmins during the Caṅkam era appear to have served as priests and advisors to the kings, it is important here to highlight the fact that many of the Brahmin-advisors were court poets (pulavar), and that their counsel was often given in Tamil verse which had been skilfully composed in accordance with the literary tradition of the Tamils. According to G. C. Hart, it would even be accurate to say that their immersion in Tamil culture was such that neither the content nor the style of their compositions was essentially different from that of the non-Brahmin poets.[4]

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[1] History of the Tamils from the Earliest Times to 600 A.D., pp. 480, 481 and 499.

[2] The Poems of Ancient Tamil, pp. 51-56, 67-68.

[3] Brahmins laud the war drum, a traditionally sacred Tamil symbol, with modified Sanskrit mantras (Patiṟṟuppattu, 30). Brahmins were called to officiate at a rite in which men who died in bed, instead of on the battlefield, were honored by being cut with swords before burial (Puṟam 93).

[4] The Poems of Ancient Tamil, p. 51.

One renowned Brahmin poet was Kapilar. In one of his own compositions, he refers to himself as an antaṇar[1] and, in the work of another Caṅkam author, he is acknowledged as 'pulaṇaḻak karṟa vantaṇar,' i.e., 'the Brahmin poet of faultless learning.'[2] Not only did Kapilar contribute verses of both the akam and puṟam genre, but tradition also maintains that he composed the love poem known as Kuṟiñcippāṭṭu, one of the ten Idylls, to bring home the sweetness of the Tamil language to the Aryan King Prakattan.[3] Nor was Kapilar unique in holding this position. One Tamil scholar has identified the names of some ten other Caṅkam poets who were Brahmins[4] and another has estimated that approximately one-tenth of the 473 Caṅkam poets were Brahmins.[5] Brahmins by birth and poets by profession, these learned individuals were living examples of the bond that was being developed between the religious cultural traditions of the North and the humanistic or secular cultural tradition of the South. Thus they complemented the critical role of the Tamil chieftains and kings who on the one

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[1]Puṟam 200: yāṉē paricilaṉ maṉṉu mantaṇaṉ.

[2]Puṟam 126.

[3]K. K. Pillay, A Social History of the Tamils (Madras: University of Madras, 1958), p. 177.

[4]Ibid., p. 222.

[5]G. C. Hart, The Poems of Ancient Tamil, p. 149.

hand supported the Brahmanical cult of the Aryans, and on the other patronized the Muttamil tradition of the bards and poets.[1]

Looking ahead, it will be seen that Mūlar and the Tēvāram poets were actually building on this well-established relationship when they set out to celebrate the greatness of both the Tamil and the Sanskrit traditions. It will also be seen that the Tirumantiram even presents a skilfully designed 'mytho-logical' argument in its defense of this practice. Yet the very fact that Mūlar felt the need to offer an apologia for this stance indicates the presence of some opposition.

To appreciate why this link was perceived as a controversial religious issue during the bhakti period, and to clarify how it relates to other themes dealt with in the Tirumantiram, we must take into account some of the political cultural and religious changes that occurred during the 300 year interim following the close of the first historical period. In the next section, then, we will be concerned with stressing those events of the interim era which

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[1]The song of Maturaikāñci provides a clear example of this dual sponsorship. The poet describes the Pāṇṭiyaṉ Neduñjeliyaṉ as a generous patron of bards and poets, because of the Tamil culture, and as a great monarch who has performed many sacrifices (vēlvi, Skt. yāgam) and received instruction from learned teachers āciriyar, Skt. ācāryas) (837-841). Puram 224 similarly eulogizes the Cōḻa monarch Karikāla as one who "feasted his minstrels and their families," and as one who "guided by priests learned in dharma, performed sacrifices according to Vedic rites."

show how the Brahmanical link with the Tamil tradition was strengthened in some circles and challenged in others.

PERIOD TWO: THE KALĀBHRA INTERREGNUM

The second historical period of South India is one for which relatively little direct evidence is available. According to M. Arunachalam, a historian of Tamil literature, it is an era that "has been labelled by all writers, literary critics, historians and writers on philosophy in South India as the Dark Period of the Tamiḻnāṭu in the three spheres of religion, history and literature."[1] It has been designated the Kalābhra Interregnum because it is believed that the triple kingdoms of the Cēras, Cōḻas and Pāṇṭiyas was overrun during this time by a powerful enemy called the Kalābhras.

Knowledge of these invaders comes from the Vēḷvikuṭi grant (768 A.D.) written in both Sanskrit and Tamil,[2] which states that "a king named Kalābhraṉ[3] took possession of the extensive earth driving away numberless great kings (adhi-rājas).[4] Although there are several divergent

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[1] "The Kalābhras," pp. 3-4.

[2] The Sanskrit is written in grantha script while the Tamil in Vatteluttu.

[3] Arunachalam explains that although Kalābhraṉ is used here in the singular, it is used in the plural (Kalabhrar) later in the grant, and thus should be taken to refer to a tribe or clan rather than an individual. Ibid., p.16.

[4] K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, The Pāṇḍiyaṉ Kingdom, p.47.

opinions[1] regarding the origin, background and activity of the Kaḷabhras, I will be working with the re-construction put forward by Arunachalam who has argued from a literary perspective in his recent monograph, "The Kaḷabhras in the Pāṇṭiya Country and Their Impact on the Life and Letters There."[2]

In this detailed study, the Kaḷabhras are described as a clan of non-Tamil invaders who dethroned legitimate Southern kings and more or less successfully extended their rule over Maturai in Pāṇṭināṭu, Kāvirippattinam (Pukār) in Cōḻanāṭu and Kāñci in Toṇṭaināṭu, better known as the land of the Pallavas. Their language is specified as Prakrit, Pali and possibly early Kannada; but they would also have had knowledge of Sanskrit. The various branches of the Kaḷabhra clan are shown to be followers of either Buddhism or Jainism. Stressing the political, cultural and religious differences between the Kaḷabhras and those they came to dominate, Arunachalam argues that these new rulers were responsible for a general suppression of both the Brahmanical cult and the threefold arts of Tamil culture. Although his arguments do not seem to be strong enough to support such a sweeping claim, many of them are

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[1]Arunachalam, "The Kaḷabhras," pp. 20-36.

[2]Ibid.

valuable for showing the emergence of Jains and Buddhists during this historically murky period. In the remarks that follow, I am more interested in characterizing the religious activity of the period than in determining the identity or activity of the Kalābhra rulers as such.

The Religious Situation In Paṇṭināṭu

The situation in Maturai and the broader kingdom of the Pāṇṭiyaṉs is shown to confirm this thesis. In the Caṅkam Age, Maturai was unmistakably the centre of Tamil culture in the South. Its kings were celebrated as great patrons of Muttamil and as supports of the Vedic cult. While there is no indication of antagonism toward non-Vedic paths, not one of the Pāṇṭiyaṉ rulers of the Caṅkam Age has been identified as a follower of either the Jain or Buddhist faiths. Given the intertwining of religion, culture and political power in this region, it can be seen how the Brahmanical spheres of influence would have come to be threatened or at least subordinated with the takeover by a Kaḷābhra clan who possibly were non-Tamils and Jains.

Arunachalam maintains that such was in fact the case. He points out that of the sixty-three Nāyaṉārs (Tamil Śaiva Saints) who are honored in the Śaiva tradition, only four[1]

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[1]Of the four, only one (Murti Nāyaṉār) pre-dates the missionary activity of Campantar. The other three had come under his influence (King Pāṇṭiyaṉ Nedumaran, Queen Mangaiyarkkarasi, Minister Kulachirai).

were born in Pāṇṭināṭu.[1] He further notes that, following the overthrow of the Kaḷabhras about 575 A.D., we find the Pāṇṭiyaṉ queen summoning 'the Śaiva bhakta' Campantar, for the express purpose of releasing her land from the grip of the Jains. Campantar, a Śaiva Brahmin from the Cōḷa city of Cīrkaḷi proceeds to the Pāṇṭiyaṉ capital, not unlike one of the early bards. There he confronts and subsequently defeats the Jains with words and miraculous signs.

Examining the process by which this victory was attained, it quickly becomes apparent that freedom from the power of the Kaḷabhras meant not only political independence but religious and cultural liberation as well. As we see in the following hymn sung by Campantar in Maturai, the national identity of the Southern population was rooted in a blend of Brahmanical religion and Tamil culture, and thus its full restoration was portrayed in terms of overcoming the Jains and their Prakritic forms of speech. The relevant lines are as follows:

1. Listen, O you gazelle-eyed Pāṇṭiya Queen. Do not be concerned that I am a child still dripping with my mother's milk. I am not one who yields to these wicked people who congregate in hill places. When the great Lord of Alavai stands by me.

2. To evil-filled, unbending ones who dine standing and roam about naked to the embarrassment of the people, who shout and loudly proclaim in the Prakrit language (while) neglecting Sanskrit which contains both Mantras and Āgamas - I am not one who yields when the great Lord stands by my side.

3. To these weird men who wander naked to the consternation of the people (even) after being vanquished in vain debates in which they argue things are and are not and also concede agreement and non-agreement - I am not one who yields....

4. To those who are blinded by non-knowledge of the fruits of pure (Sen) Tamil and Sanskrit, who wander like monkeys naming themselves Kaṇṭucenaṉ, Iṉṭucenaṉ, Dharmucenaṉ, Kanakacenaṉ, and so forth - I am not one who yields....

5. To the mischievous pranks of those who are devoid of compassion but beg for alms from those who pass by, pretending to preach virtue to them and to entertain them by narrating vain accounts (like the story of the bird in the cage) - I am not one who yields...

6. To these futile persons who vainly proclaim they are doing tapas, such Nandis as Kanakanandi, Pushpanandi, Pavananandi, Kumananandi, Sunakanandi, Kunakanandi and Ivananandi who vainly proclaim they abstain from drink - I am not one who yields....

7. "We have no bonds. Concerns have we none." Thus they make such impressive statements yet are themselves devoid of impeccable conduct - I am not one who yields....

8. To those who follow the precept of walking behind others trembling with peacock feathers in their hands, a mat tucked under their arms, and a small water-pot in one hand, all of which suggest false austerity without submitting to the fire-like Lord who scorched the great demon (i.e. Ravana) who boasted none was equal to him - I am not one who yields....

9. They who shall not adore the feet of the Holy One who Brahmā and Viṣṇu could not know are like men in agony of death; they pluck their hair with false austerity, dust-laden bodies, and mouths filled with words fit for the gutter - to them I will not yield....

10. To the evil men (such as the Jains) and cākiyars (i.e. Buddhists) who place not (on their heads) the roseate feet of the Lord, who refrain from worshipping him while holding a mat and other insignia and wearing signs of false austerity and not following the path of the great Book (Ponku Nūl) yet making fun of those learned in it - I am not one who yields....

11. To these incorrigible men in pursuit of the śramana (Tml. amana) path, to these I do not yield with the beautiful Lord of Tiruvalavai being present within me. The one who recited this cogently is the Lord of Tamil, Ñāṉacampantar. To those who recite these ten (verses) spoken by Campantar before the Tamil king, no harm will come.

(Campantar, Alavai Maturai decade, 339)

In every one of his 384 hymns this saint makes some disparaging remarks about the Jains (Camaṇar)[1] and Buddhists (Tēra).[2] His attacks, especially against the former, were strong and unyielding. Arunachalam points out,[3] however, that the brunt of the critique was not directed against the Jain doctrine or Jainism per se. Rather, what Campantar condemned most vigorously were the concrete Jain practices which, in their extreme forms, were anti-social and ran contrary to the traditional social patterns of the Tamils.[4]

The Religious Situation In Toṇṭaināṭu

Such religious antagonism was not confined to the territory of the Pāṇṭiyas. It was also encountered in Toṇṭainātu, otherwise known as the land of the Pallavas, and to a lesser extent in Cōḷanāṭu where the Tirumantiram was to

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[1] In Tamil, the Jains were called camanar, a word taken from the Prakrit samaṇa which, in turn, had been derived from the Sanskrit śramana, meaning an ascetic.

[2] The Buddhists were called tēra, meaning the elders.

[3] "The Kalabhras in the Pāṇḍiya Country," p. 125.

[4] The Jains who were active in the South during this period appear to have been members of the Digambara sect (literally, those whose garment was the sky) who went about naked. Other customs which ran counter to the prevailing Tamil culture were the practice of not bathing, of refusing to clean the teeth, of eating from their hands and of plucking their hair since no shaving with a razor was allowed.

be composed.

In Tonṭainatu, various religious groups were active - Śaivas, Vaiṣṇavas, Buddhists and Jains. In the capital city of Kañci, each of these groups had had its own educational institution from at least the fourth century. The history of the Pallava encounter with the Kaḷabhras has been generally shrouded in mystery but their occupation of this area appears to have been less comprehensive than it was in Pāṇṭinātu. If Cēkkiḻār's Periya Purāṇa account is correct, we may even have an example of a Kaḷabhra ruler named Kūṟṟuvaṉ who became not only a follower of Śiva but one of the 63 recognized Nāyaṉār saints.[1]

According to Cēkkiḻār, this ruler had initially sought to be crowned in Citamparam but the Śaiva priest serving in the temple there refused on the grounds that he was not of the Cōḻa line. From fear of this would-be usurper, the priests then fled to the Cēra kingdom. It is then recorded that Kūṟṟuvaṉ has a dream in which he is crowned by receiving the feet of Śiva upon his head. Enlightened, he continues to rule and to worship Śiva.

While the reference to the flight of the priests indirectly brings out the political challenge posed by the Kaḷabhra rulers, it is only later in the time of Appar (7th) that the religious tensions of the interim period were

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[1]K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, The Pāṇḍiyaṉ Kingdom, p. 49.

brought out into the field of recorded history. Although we have no indication of Appar's apologetic talents as a Jain monk, we do know that upon his conversion to Śaivism, Appar became an avid critic of the paths followed by both Buddhist and Jain mendicants (śramanas). At various points in his hymns, he openly assails their ascetic practices as being "useless acts"[1], and yet, like Campantar, his main objection to these groups was that they neither studied the Tamil language nor dedicated their lives to God.[2] The Periya Purāṇa account maintains that Appar was persecuted by the Jains following his conversion. Cēkkiḻār further states that his harassment was done with the approval of the reigning Pallava monarch Mahendravarman I who apparently was a Jain himself. The persecution ceased when the latter was won over to the Śaiva faith by the example of this great Śiva bhakta.

The conversion of this Pallava ruler[3] tends to bear

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[1] Tēvāram 3.108.8.

[2] Tēvāram 5.58.9. Although there are indications that various groups of Jains were familiar with many tongues including Sanskrit and Tamil, it appears that different groups of the Digambara Jains must not have been proficient in the latter and for this together with their denial of the Vedas and worship of Śiva, they came under attack as those who were harming the culture of the South. A more objective assessment of the Jain role in relation to the culture will be made in the next section.

[3] K. A. Nilakanta Śāstri writes, "There is a verse in the Trichy inscriptions of Mahendravarman which furnishes clear proof that the king did indeed return to Śaivism from some other creed which may have been Jainism." Development of Religion in South India (Calcutta: Orient Longmans, Ltd., 1963), p.42.

out Mr. Arunachalam's contention that religion, politics and culture were closely interconnected at this time. For Mahēndravarman's conversion proved to be a boon for the Tamil culture as well as for the Śaivas. The latter established his dynasty as an arbiter and patron of the early Tamil culture.[1] Since this ruler was himself a playwright, musician and architect, this meant that Muttamil was again to flourish under his skillful aegis. Even the offical court language became bilingual. Whereas Pallava inscriptions prior to his reign had been composed in either Prakrit (from 250-350 A.D.) or Sanskrit (from 350-600 A.D.) , those written thereafter were produced in both Sanskrit and Tamil.[2]

It is against the background of the tensions arising during this transitional period that the mantras of Mūlar as well as the hymns of the Tēvāram saints should be read. For a closer look at how the Tamil and Sanskritic influences came together in the mandala where the Tirumantiram was composed, we will conclude our study of this interim period with a brief sketch of the religious situation in Cōḻanāṭu.

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[1]Romila Thapar, A History of India (Middlesex: Penguin, 1966), vol. 1, p. 170.

[2]It is not insignificant that though the eulogies of the king remained in Sanskrit in subsequent grants, the details of the grant itself were in Tamil and not Sanskrit. An instance of this shift is seen in the grant of the Pallava Nandivarman who reigned in 753. Thapar, History, p.178.

The Religious Situation in Cōḻanāṭu

The land of the Cōḻas was physically, politically and culturally sandwiched between the dominant powers of Toṇṭaināṭu and Pāṇṭināṭu. From the earliest times its seaport capital of Pukār had been a major trade centre and through its various economic contracts it had become heir to the cultural influences spilling over from the North and the South. From the South came reinforcement of the Tamil culture. This was represented by the Caṅkam description of the alliance between "the Cōḻa king who was Lord of the Kāviri...and the Pāṇṭiyaṉ monarch who was the merciful ruler of Kutal (Maturai), the seat of Tamil learning."[1] From the North, the city was exposed to the diverse religious traditions of the Aryans. In fact, it is when the Caṅkam literature describes this Cōḻa capital that we first hear of "settlements of Brahmaṇas, Bauddhas, and Jainas in any city of the Tamil country (other than Kāñci)."[2] An idea of the extent of the Brahmanical imprint on the religious life of the town can be gathered from the Cilappatikāram account of the twenty-eight day Indra festival held there each year.[3]

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[1] Puram 58.

[2] Iyengar, History of the Tamils, p. 354. In Caṅkam literature, Pukār is known as Kāvirippattinam, the city of the Kāviri.

[3] Canto 5.

When Pukār came under the control of the Kaḷabhras, it was the Buddhist position that seems to have been strengthened. Our knowledge of this comes from the Pāli words of the Buddhist monk, Buddhadatta whom K. A. Nilakanta Sastri describes as having lived in the interim following the close of the early Caṅkam era.[1] At the close of his Pāli manuscript of the Abhidhammāvatāra he gives an impressive description of Pukār with its rich merchants, large palaces and beautiful gardens. At the close of a second Pāli work, the Vinayaviniccaya, the same author explains how he was writing from a Buddhist monastery on the Kāviri and how he began and concluded his work during the reign of Accutavikkanta of the Kaḷabhra kula (clan).

In contrast to the Kaḷabhras ruling elsewhere in the Tamil land, this Accuta was favorably remembered by a later Tamil commentator as one who fed the (sacrificial) fires and who was like Viṣṇu in extending protection to his people.[2] Arunachalam takes these verses as an indication that the line of "Kaḷabhras at Kāvērippaṭṭinam, unlike the one at Maturai, was headed by benevolent and just rulers who had earned the love and esteem of the Tamil poets."[3] A possible

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[1] The Cōlas (Madras: The University of Madras, 1955), p. 101.

[2] The commentator, who lived during the 11th century, was Gunasagarar. The two works in which he compliments Accuta are the Yāpparuṅkalam and the Yāpparuṅkalakkarikai.

[3] The Kalabhras in the Pāṇḍiya Country, p. 55.

indication of the religious tolerance experienced in Cōḻanāṭu is the fact that 38 of the 63 Nāyaṉārs come from that territory. Ñāṉacampantar was a Brahmin from the Cōḻa country but, as we saw above, his most hostile encounters with the Jains took place in Pāṇṭināṭu. It is also interesting to note that the Pāṇṭiyaṉ Queen who summoned Campantar to Maturai had likewise been born in Cōḻanāṭu. Finally, there is the observation made by C. V. Narayana Ayyar:

> From the places referred to by Sambandar as noted for music and dancing, we seem to have reason to conclude that it was in the temples of the Cōḻa country alone that such accomplishments were greatly appreciated.[1]

The strengthening of the Śaiva tradition in this region is often associated with the Cōḻa king Kōccēṅkaṇaṉ who is thought to have lived in the 5th century.[2] This king who resided in the inland capital of Uraiyūr is remembered for having built some seventy-eight Śiva temples.[3]

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[1] Origin and Early History, p. 323.

[2] Those who suggest an earlier date for this ruler generally cite the reference made in the 74th poem of the Puram collection but the allusion there occurs in the colophōn, not in the poem itself. The colophons are widely held to have been added about the 6th or 7th century. For further discussion of this question, see M. Rajamanickam, Development of Śaivism, p. 323.

[3] Both the Āḻvārs and Nāyaṉārs testify to this accomplishment. The 8th century Vaiṣṇava hymnist, Tirumaṅgai writes:

> Go to the ornamented temple of Tirunāraiyūr
> which was resorted to by the Cōḻa of the
> fortunate family
> who ruled the earth and built seventy-eight
> temples (kōyil)

Whether or not the Periya Purāna is historically accurate when it connects Kōcceṅkaṇaṉ with the worship of Śiva at Tillai (Citamparam), indications are that it was about this time or shortly thereafter that this southern shrine became one of the most important centers of Tamil bhakti.

Thus, the political atmosphere of the Cōḻa land appears to have been less hostile to the practice of Śaivism and other Hindu sects than it was elsewhere in the Tamil country. In this region, the religious traditions of the Tamils may have been challenged and curtailed, but they do not seem to have been radically thwarted or systematically suppressed. It may be supposed, therefore, that with the defeat of the Kaḷabhras at the end of the 6th century and the subsequent successes of the bhakti campaign spearheaded by the Tamil Śaiva saints, the re-establishment of Śaiva supremacy would not have been an overwhelming task. It was within their own lifetime that both Appar and Campantar saw the Tamil bhakti movement inspire a creative outpouring of religious literature, art and architecture. That is, they witnessed the building of permanent rock-cut shrines, the royal patronage of the temple cult and a general revival of Brahmanical rites, myths and Sanskrit texts.

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to the eight-armed Īśvara whose mouth is radiant
with the holy words of the Rg Veda.

Also Campantar "Tiruvaikanmātakkōyil" stanzas 1,4,5 and "Tiruvampar" st. 1.

As we examine the Brahmanical or neo-Brahmanical character of the bhakti movement in the following section, it should become clear that the latter not only undercut the attraction of the Jains and Buddhists but also occasioned a heightened consciousness of the religious differences and divisions within the orthodox community. Our discussion of both of these points will provide a direct lead into the study of the Tirumantiram as a text which propounds a spirituality predicated upon the reality of and potential for diversity within the Śaiva tradition.

PERIOD THREE: THE PERIOD OF TAMIL BHAKTI

If the second historical period of South India was marked by the ascendency of Jains and Buddhists along with a growing feeling of antagonism between followers of the orthodox and heterodox sects, the third epoch was distinguished by a broad-based, self-conscious effort to revive the Tamil bond with the Sanskrit tradition of the Brahmins. With the political revival of Tamil rule having been achieved by the Pallavas and Pāṇṭiyas about 575 A.D.,[1] it remained for the poet saints of the period to inaugurate a full-scale revival of religion and culture in the Tamil country.

> It is the effort to reclaim the country for the Vedic, Purāṇic and devotional path that

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[1]Arunachalam, "The Kalabhras," p. 21.

> threw up the Śaivite and Vaiṣṇavite saints in Tamil. This movement began in the 6th century and gathered momentum in the next few centuries by which time the whole of the south had been completely swept back into the older faith.[1]

Given the rapidity with which the bhakti movement spread and the intensity with which the theistic cults of Hinduism were supported by its followers, it can be said that the conditions were ripe for such a restoration of the Tamil-Brahmin alliance. Yet, as we shall see, the Tamil bhaktas in general and the Tēvāram saints, in particular, were not simply advocating a return to the religio-cultural arrangement which had been worked out in the past. What the bhakti saints were promoting was an innovative understanding of the relationship between the Aryanized cult of Śiva and the indigenous Muttamil tradition of the South. Since Mūlar was concerned with various facets of the same issue, it will be helpful here first to clarify what was being revived by the bhaktas; secondly, to identify the new elements that were being introduced; and thirdly, to characterize the intra-community tensions that developed as a result of these changes. Each of these points will be taken up separately in the remaining sections of this chapter.

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[1] V. Raghavan, The Great Integrators: The Saint Singers of India (Delhi: Publications Division of Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, 1966), p. 19.

Revival and Continuity

The hymns of Appar, Campantar and Cuntarar make it quite clear that the goal of the Tamil bhakti movement was twofold. That is, it was intended to revive both the Brahmanical religion and the cultural identity of the Tamils which was rooted in the Muttamil tradition. With regard to the first task, the bhaktas may be described as having spearheaded a revival or restoration in the sense that they were rekindling and spreading a faith which was not unknown in the South but which had, for some time, become overshadowed by the religious activity of the Jains and Buddhists. That Śaivism had been prominent in the early centuries of the Christian era is evident from allusions made in several Sanskrit and Tamil literary sources. In the Ādi Parva of the Mahābhārata one Pāṇṭiyaṉ king is shown to acknowledge that his ancestors had worshipped Śiva for the sake of obtaining offspring.[1] In a Tamil Caṅkam verse Śiva is referred to as one of the main props of the universe[2] and, in another, he is described as

> the great lord, the creator of the water,
> the earth and the fire, the air and the sky
> who is the head of the deities.[3]

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[1] Chapter 235.

[2] Puram 46.

[3] nīrum nilaṉum tīyum valiyum
māka vicumpō ṭaintuṭaṉ iyarriya.

Still other verses suggest that Śiva temples were known throughout Tamilnad. The author of the Cilappatikāram mentions several such temples - one dedicated to the 'Unborn Lord' which was located in Pukār,[1] a second to the 'three-eyed Lord' in Maturai[2] and a third located in Kāñci where the kings who bows before no earthly ruler, comes and prostrates himself.[3]

Ascetics and Brahmins are also linked to the cult of Śiva in some Caṅkam stanzas. Śaiva ascetics seem to be referred to in Narriṇai.141 which speaks of ascetics (tavaciyar) with braided hair who perform penance under the Koṉṟai tree.[4] A more explicit identification is made in Puṟam 166 where the Brahmin Viṉṉandāyam is celebrated as one

> who laid low the strength of those who opposed
> Śiva's ancient books (nūl).
> who saw through the sophistry of false doctrines,
> who preferred truth, shunned error
> and completed the twenty-one kinds of Vedic
> sacrifice.

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maḻuval nediyōṉ talaiva ṉāka

Maturaikkāñci, lines 453-455
English, lines 502-505

[1]piṟavā yākkaip periyōṉ kōyilum, Canto 5, line 169.

[2]nutalviḻi nāṭṭat tiṟaiyōṉ kōyilum, Canto 14, line 7, also Puṟam 6.

[3]Canto 26.

[4]Śiva's garland is described as having been made of Koṉṟai flowers.

The eleventh song of the Paripāṭal also refers to Brahmins (antaṇar) learned in the extensive books (viri nūl) who were initiating a Śaiva festival being held on the banks of the Vaikai River.

It was this age old tradition of worshipping Śiva that the Tamil bhaktas sought to revive and spread across the length and breadth of Tamilakam. In the process, several other areas of religious activity were subsequently affected. By dedicating themselves to a life-long pilgrimage during which they visited and sang about some 250 temples and shrines, the Tēvāram saints had given a new impetus to this ancient practice which had been followed by simple devotees[1] as well as by Brahmins.[2]

In terms of content, the Tēvāram hymns juxtaposed both Tamil and Aryan imagery and may be said to have inspired a fresh surge of enthusiasm for visual representations of Śiva and numerous other deities. On the one hand, they incorporated anthropocentric and nature-oriented akam images of the countryside and of human companionship to express the devotees' sentiments of longing and attachment for the Lord. On the other hand, they turned to anthropomorphic descriptions of Śiva - of 'his' crescent-adorned hair,

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[1] Paripāṭal 19.50-57 describes a group of devotees who are journeying to the Tiruppaṟṟaṉakaṉṟam Temple of Murukaṉ.

[2] In the 11th Canto of the Cilappatikāram we find a Brahmin explaining how he had come to the South to see the famous Temple of the reclining Viṣṇu.

his braided locks, his ash-covered body and of his mythic exploits in order to convey the notions of Śiva's majesty, might and generosity:

> Oh swans that sit graceful
> Amidst the red lotuses that shine (in the sun),
> Tell the Lord of Tonipuram, the Lord of the
> world and of scripture
> That I want to embrace his feet that kicked
> the lord of death.
> Campantar Tēvāram on 'Tonipuram'

The proliferation of visual imagery was impressive. Prior to the bhakti period, images of various deities had been painted on the walls of early brick temples[1] and possibly carved on their wooden structural beams,[2] but these had all been made on perishable materials. From the time of the Tēvāram saints onward, however, an increasing number of temples came to be hewn from rock or built from stone. The latter were constructed by Pallava kings like Mahēndravarman, who had been converted by Appar, and by his successors who had been influenced by both Śaiva and Vaiṣṇava bhaktas. The architects of these great rulers excavated more than 60 rock-cut temples and both those with

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[1] Paripāṭal 19.50-57. Here devotees approaching the Murukaṉ temple point out and interpret to one another the significance of the paintings they find on the walls: "This cat is Indra; this lady is Akalikai; this man is Kavutaman (Gautama) who returned; this is the stone form she assumed thanks to anger." Dorai Rangaswamy also suggests that the practice of linking certain exploits of Śiva to particular spots probably referred to the images of the deity that were popular there.

[2] TM vs. 1719.

pillared mandapas (halls) and those with more elaborately carved mandapas were embellished with expansive panels of mythological figures that were clearly inspired by the Epics and Purāṇas. As if to relieve the massive rocks of their heavy opaqueness, the Pallava sculptors rendered visible the cosmic drama of gods and goddesses, men and women, animals, plants and the elements of nature across the surfaces of these tremendous stone shrines. In this way each edifice confronted the viewer with an unforgettable visual experience of the saving mythological deeds of Viṣṇu, Śiva, Durga, Indra and other important deities.

The emotional fervor of the Tamil bhakti movement reinforced and was reinforced by the dramatic aspect of these forms of religious expression. This aspect of the revival is especially important for the study of myth in the Tirumantiram. Taking into consideration these aesthetic developments, it is not difficult to understand how Tamils of all classes would have come to acquire a general knowledge of and enthusiasm for various facets of Aryan mythology. Nor is it pedagogically unsound to assume that there would have been at least three typical responses to this increasingly familiar imagery. Aside from a minority who would call into question mythological language, there would be a small group who would know the fixed theological interpretation of the latter, an even smaller group for whom this lore generated new insights, and finally the great

majority whose grasp, on the whole, would be more primordial and emotional than conceptual and critical.

This limited reconstruction of the religious situation provides a plausible framework for understanding Tirumūlar's use of mythic figures. As one of those few who saw myths as a source of new insights, Mūlar was able to recognize (a) that Aryan myths and corresponding Tamil legends had, in fact, captured the imagination of the Tamil population, and (b) that the vivid imagery had not only strengthened the spirit of devotion but had also increased the potential for popularizing a less profound understanding of the mythic narratives. In the case of many who heard the myths, there would have been a tendency to objectify the accounts by reifying them; in the case of the priests, a similar situation would result from a laxity or a taking-for-granted of these popular narratives such that their message would cease to challenge either their faith or practice. If Mūlar was to employ Śaiva myths as vehicles for kindling a true understanding of the Śaiva religion, then it would be necessary to offset this kind of domestication of the traditional narratives. Tirumūlar's reexamination of these myths was to be undertaken in the Tamil language and this brings us to a consideration of the second major contribution of the bhakti movement, namely the concerted effort to revive the threefold aspects of the Tamil cultural tradition.

Without repeating what has been already discussed, it is sufficient to note that the Tamil bhaktas and the Tēvāram poets, in particular, were directly and indirectly responsible for a renaissance of the Tamil arts of poetry (iyal), music (icai) and, to some extent, of dance (nāṭakam). This can be seen in the fact that the hymns composed at each shrine not only reflected the traditional ārruppaṭai (guide song) genre of poetry but were designed to be sung as well. As one Tamil scholar explains, the hymns "were written in such a way that they could be sung by a company of people, some of whom played upon musical instruments, and some of whom performed dances.:[1] More than 500 of their paṭikams (decades) were in paṇṇ, that is, were specifically set to music. Campantar himself composed more than 350 decades in paṇṇ and for this, he was hailed by Cuntarar as "the master of the sweet Tamil language" (narramiḻ valla ñānacampantan).[2] Campantar, in turn, describes his poetry as "the Tamil spoken by Campantan"[3] and, in a move reminiscent of the earlier bards and poets, he praises the reigning Tamil king as the "Pāṇṭiya skilled in Tamil music" (paṇiyal tamiḻ pāṇṭiyan).[4]

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[1] C. V. Narayan Ayyar, Origin and Early History, p.313.

[2] Tēvāram 7.55.4.

[3] Tēvāram 1.1.11.

[4] Tēvāram, Campantar 309.9.

Of the hundreds of shrines mentioned in the hymns of these saints, the one that was celebrated as the center of Southern Śaivism was the one in which the main mūrti or image was the Naṭarāj, the Lord of the dance. This was the shrine of Tillai or Citamparam which came to be known simply as 'the kōyil,' (i.e., 'the temple') and this setting is perhaps the most appropriate for visualizing Mūlar's role as mediator for, if we follow the accounts given in the Tēvāram, we find it was here that the Tamil tradition of poetry, music and dance[1] came into direct contact with the Brahmanical tradition associated with 'Vedic chants and sacrificial fires.'

In one Citamparam Decade, Campantar described how the people who tend fire in conformity with learning (i.e., Brahmins) live in Citamparam, "the place where the Lord willingly resides."[2] He describes the Āgamic ritual whereby the Lord who chose the konṟai flower and sang many gītās (songs) along with the Vedas, is bathed in sweet melted butter, milk and curd by Brahmins (antaṇar) who will not separate from him.[3] He sings of the young girls who play with balls in their hands in Citamparam where the Lord who has given forth the verses of the faultless Vedas, makes his

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[1] Tēvāram, Campantar, 259.2.

[2] "Citamparam" Decade of Campantar, "karraṅkeri ōmpi...." vs. 1.

[3] "Citamparam Decade, "āṭiṉay..." vs. 1.

home,[1] and of the bhaktas (Tml. pattar) who pour water over the Lord, place flowers on him and recite suitable words.[2] The picture one gets from the verses of Campantar is of a special shrine, chosen by the Lord, wherein reside a large number of good people (nallavar) and Brahmins (maraiyōr).[3] It was in the Citamparam compound that the followers of the Vedic, Āgamic and Tamil bhakti cults came together and, according to the Tirumantiram, it was there, too, that Mūlar received his commission from Śiva to compose his Tamil Āgama.[4]

To appreciate why this document was needed to mediate issues on which these groups differed, it is necessary to take into consideration not only the conservative side of the bhakti revival which we have just discussed, but the innovative side of the movement as well. While the former served to align the Tamil bhaktas with the orthodox tradition of the Brahmins, and clearly distinguished their activities from that of the heterodox groups, the latter shows how the bhakta leaders refused to be co-opted by any religious establishment, whether Vedic or Āgamic, and indicates the areas in which they proved to be a challenge to the orthodox tradition as well.

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[1] "Citamparam" Decade, "karraṅkeri ōmpi...." vs. 3.

[2] Tēvāram, Campantar, "pattarōtu palarum..." 21 vs. 4.

[3] "Citamparam" Decade, "ātinay..." vs. 2.

[4] TM vss. 73 and 74.

Revival and Change

There were several ways in which the Tamil bhaktas called attention to divisions within the orthodox Hindu community. Unlike the conservative Brahmins who upheld the primacy of the Vedic fire cult, recitation of Sanskrit mantras and the strict observance of caste, the bhaktas favored the performance of image-centered Āgamic rituals which encouraged the recital of Agamic mantras and simple offerings of rice, flowers and water; offerings which could be made by people of all castes.[1] The matter of mantras was important. According to Appar and Campantar, the bhaktas, Brahmin and non-Brahmin alike, could be distinguished from the non-sectarian Brahmins precisely by the mantras they pronounced:

antaṇark karuṅkalam arumaṟai yāraṅkam
naṅkaḷuk karuṅkalam namaccivayāvē

The rare jewel of the Brahmin (antaṇar) is
the Veda with its six limbs,
The rare jewel for us is the 'namacivāya'
Appar, 11.5

centaḷa lōmpiya cemmai vētiyark
kantiyuṇ mantiramaṁ ceḷuttumē

The final mantra of the pious Brahmins
who raise the holy fire
Is the five-lettered mantra.
Campantar, 280.2

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[1] Tēvāram, Campantar, 3, stanza 1.

Here we see an example of how the bhaktas triggered an awareness of intra-community differences, differences between the Vedic-centered Brahmins known as Smārtas and the sectarian Aṭi Śaivas who acknowledged Āgamic practices such as the utterance of the pañcākṣara (i.e., namaśivāya).

Another way in which the bhakti movement challenged the status quo of the Tamil-Brahmin bond was by introducing the Tamil vernacular into the Brahmanical worship of Śiva. Prior to the time of the poet-saints, the Āgamic worship of Śiva utilized chiefly Sanskritic texts. Whenever earlier Brahmins such as Kapilar had used and promoted the Tamil language, it had been for secular purposes, for anthropocentric and humanistic literature. Later, when Tamil was adopted for more religious works like the Paripāṭal (4th A.D.?) and Tirumurukārṟupaṭai (7th A.D.?), it was not Śiva that was celebrated but Māl (Viṣṇu) or Cevvel (Murukaṉ). Nor is there evidence that either of these two works were incorporated into the public worship of Śiva in a temple setting despite the fact that the Tirumurukārṟupaṭai subsequently came to be accepted into the Tamil canon. With the composition of the Tēvāram hymns, however, this situation changed. For the authors of these works not only sang their hymns at temple sites throughout Tamilakam but they urged their followers to continue the practice:[1]

[1]Even if these closing verses were added later by disciples, they may be taken as reflecting the directives

This is the breviary of Tamil verse sung by
Ñāṉacampantar of the famed Cerkaḻi,
It hails the trident-adorned Lord of Citamparam
where live men of lofty principles;
Those who are able to sing this (breviary) in
groups are great.

"Citamparam: Decade of Campantar
"karrankeri onri..." vs. 11

It was not long before these hymns came to be regarded as the 'Tamil Veda,' an evaluation that would not have been shared by the more conservative Śaiva Brahmins who favored the exclusive use of Sanskrit as the language of ritual. History shows that southern Brahmins had accepted Tamil in the cultural domain but now the bhaktas were making it necessary for the orthodox community to examine its willingness to acknowledge the Muttamiḻ tradition as an appropriate medium of religious expression, that is, as the one to be employed in the context of public worship, cultic practice and more systematic religious instruction. In the Vaiṣṇava community this issue would be taken up by Nathamuni (A.D. 842-924) who sought to bring together Tamil devotion expressed in the Divyaprabandham and the Sanskritic Pañcarātra Āgamas.[1] In the Śaiva community, a response was formulated by Tirumūlar in the 7th or 8th century and this

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of the saints themselves.

[1]Thomas J. Hopkins, The Hindu Religious Tradition (Encino, Calif. and Belmont, Calif.: Dickenson Publishing Company, Inc., 1971), p. 118.

will be considered in our chapter on the apologetic function of mythic figures in the Tirumantiram.

A third way in which the Tamil bhaktas brought an innovative dimension to the revival was by their evident disregard of caste distinctions. Of the 63 Śaiva bhakta saints known as Nāyaṉārs many were not Brahmins or kings but merchants, Veḷḷāḷas and even a potter, washerman, hunter and fisherman.[1] Campantar, who was born a Vedic Brahmin, was continually accompanied on his journeys by a lowly pāṇar lute player along with the player's wife and their troupe. In one verse this saint refers to a pāṇar singing the praises of the Lord with great devotion and becoming a recipient of the Lord's blessings.[2] According to Cekkilar, Campantar even addresses this pāṇar as 'aiyer,' a title usually reserved for Brahmins.[3] Opposition to caste privilege is made even more explicit in the following verse of Appar:[4]

> O! Fools, who speak of various śāstras,
> Of what avail is your ancestry and family?
> If you worship Śiva saying that he (alone)
> is pure,
> You will gain His grace in a thrice.

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[1]For a complete listing of these saints see M. A. Dorai Rangaswamy, Religion and Philosophy, vol. II, pp. 1103-4.

[2]Campantar 1.62.9.

[3]Periya Purāṇa vs. 133.

[4]Appar 174.3.

This rejection of superiority based on caste alone was not unknown in the South, but up until the bhakti period, the main proponents of this anti-Brahmanical stance were the Buddhists and Jains. With the appearance of these verbal attacks, aspects of the Brahmanical tradition were being challenged from within the Hindu community. More prophetic than priestly, the Tamil bhaktas were prepared to critique Vedic and Āgamic rituals. Indirectly they did this by honoring individual Nāyaṉārs such as the hunter Kaṇṇappar[1] and the Veḷḷāḷa Śakkiyar[2] whose worship of Śiva would have been regarded as sacrilegious by orthodox standards since they followed neither the rites laid down in the Vedas nor in the Āgamas. More direct critiques can also be found in their works as when Appar asks

> Why bathe in Gaṅga's stream, or Kāviri's?
> Why go to Comorin in Konku's land?
> Why seek the waters of the sounding sea?
> Release is theirs, and theirs alone, who call
> In every place upon the Lord of all.[3]

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[1]Kaṇṇappar was a hunter who made meat offerings before a Śiva linga which he also anointed with water poured from his mouth. In Cēkkiḻār's recounting of this story, he mentions that these offerings were regarded as polluting by the Brahmin Śivakōcariyar who was versed in the Āgamas for performing pūjā (Tml. pūcai).

[2]Śakkiyar, a former Buddhist who developed a special devotion toward Śiva, as revealed in the Śiva liṅgam, adored the latter by affectionately throwing pebbles at the liṅgam rather than the flowers which were prescribed in the Āgamas.

[3]kankaiyāṭileṉkāviriyāṭileṉ
koṅkutaṇakumarittuṟaiyāṭile

Why chant the Vedas or hear the śāstra's lore?
Why daily teach the books of righteousness?
Why the Vedāṅgas six say over and over?
Release is theirs and theirs alone whose heart,[4]
From thinking of its Lord shall never depart.

Despite the fact that the Tēvāram saints themselves crisscrossed the fivefold regions of Tamilnad and visited more than 200 shrines on the Kāvēri and elsewhere, they, nevertheless, reserved the right to critique the whole ritualistic enterprise. They would freely praise the Vedas even as they voiced their reservations about those who recited them without understanding. They would advocate pilgrimages but only so long as those travels did not become a substitute for or hindrance to making the more important journey inward. And, in the same vein, they would encourage various Āgamic practices provided the worshipper was able to move beyond the externals toward an experience of the Lord himself. Because of this outspokenness, the challenge of these Southern saints was felt not only by the heterodox Jains and Buddhists but by the orthodox as well.

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noṅkumākaṭalō tarīrāṭile
neṅkumīcaṉeṉātavarkkillaiyē

Appar, F. Kingsbury and G. E. Phillips, Hymns of the Tamil Śaivite Saints (London: Oxford University Press, 1921), pp. 56, 57.

[4]vētamōtileṉcāttiraṅkēṭkile
nītinūlpalanittalpayiṟṟile
nōtiyaṅkamōrāṟumuṉarile
nīcaṉaiyulkuvārkkaṉṟiyillaiyē

Ibid. pp. 56,57

This point is important because it leads us into a discussion of the ways in which the religious enthusiasm of the bhaktas accentuated and called attention to the traditional divisions that existed within the Hindu community, divisions which Tirumūlar would seek to reconcile with his unifying vision.

The three major Hindu cults that were to be affected by the religious activities of Mūlar and the Tēvāram saints, were the Vedic, Agamic and the bhakti. The supporters of the Vedic cult were predominantly Brahmins who were primarily concerned with safeguarding the Vedic heritage. They were steeped in Sanskritic culture and attentive to the details of Aryan religious law (varnāśrama dharma) and the sacrificial cult (yajña). Followers of the Āgamic tradition were both Brahmins such as Campantar, and non-Brahmins like Appar who favored the temple-oriented religion associated with the worship of images and the liṅgam. Like the Vedic group, the supporters of the Āgamas preserved their ritual texts in Sanskrit but unlike the former they generally made use of tantric rather than Vedic mantras.

Of the many issues which divided these two cults, the question of worship was perhaps the most central. There were two dominant Vedic groups, the Mīmāṁsākas and the Smārtas, and neither of these confined itself to the worship of a single deity. The Mīmāṁsākas, who were convinced of

the eternal efficacy of the sacrifice, maintained a basically atheistic stance. The Smārtas, on the other hand, were theistic but only insofar as they were willing to acknowledge various personal deities such as Sūrya, Ganēśa, Viṣṇu, Śiva and others as temporary manifestations of the ultimate personal Brahman. Āgamic Hindus, by contrast, were devoted to the worship of a particular deity, usually Śiva or Viṣṇu, whom they recognized as the fullness of the Supreme Reality. The differences between the two cults indicates that the relationship between them was qualified by underlying antagonism.[1]

Under the impact of Tēvāram saints, the divergence became even more apparent. For one thing, the religious activity of these bhaktas clearly strengthened the position of the Āgamic cult in the South even as it maintained a formal link with Vedic tradition. For when Appar and Campantar sang of the greatness of the Vedas they were, in fact, referring to those texts which directly or indirectly praise Śiva whom they hailed as the Lord of the Vedas.

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[1]According to P. T. Srinivas Iyengar, the earliest Āgamic cults were rivals of the Ancient Vedic cult. History of the Tamils, p. 104. This is attested to by various passages culled from the Purānas by Appaya Dikshita wherein Śivāgamas are referred to as 'moha śāstras,' that is, as (non-Vedic) scriptures intended to delude. See K. A. Nilakanta Sastri, "An Historical Sketch of Śaivism," Cultural Heritage of India, vol. 4, p. 69.

> He is of heaven; He is above the God,
> ....and (He is) the four scriptures.[1]

The bhakti campaign was primarily designed to wean the Tamil population away from the non-theistic paths of the Buddhists and Jains, but its spirited promotion of devotion to a personal God brought with it an indirect indictment of the atheistic stance of Mīmāṁsākas. The popularity of the movement led to an increase in the number of Āgamic Śaivas and Vaiṣṇavas. In addition, the saints' personal involvement with local shrines encouraged the growing demand for visual representations of the various deities, over and against the aniconic Vedic tradition of the Mīmāṁsākas and Smārtas.

On the other hand, the Tēvāram saints did not simply accept the Āgamic cult per se but had their own contribution to make. In particular, they were prepared to challenge the traditional Sanskrit domination of the worship of Śiva. To suggest that the Tamil language was comparable to Sanskrit as an effective vehicle for worship was a significant departure from the past. For although Brahmins and other Aryans had accepted and even promoted Tamil from the time of the Caṅkam era on, they had adopted it for discourse in the cultural sphere. Now, by promoting the vernacular, the bhakti saints were making it necessary for the orthodox

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[1]Appar quoted by C. Jesudasan and H. Jesudasan, A History of Tamil Literature (Calcutta: The Heritage of India Series, 1961), p. 77.

community to come to terms with the Muttamil tradition as an equally respectable partner in the religious sphere:

> ...He is above the God;
> He is Sanskrit and Tamil, and the four Scriptures.[1]

That the Tamil tradition was acquiring the stature to complement the Sanskrit tradition, especially as regards sacred literature, was clear from the fact that the Southern Śaiva tradition was beginning to refer to the collection of Tēvāram hymns not only as a 'fith Veda' but as the 'Tamil Veda.'

In their own way, then, the Tamil bhaktas offered "in part a resistance to the Aryanization of the region,"[2] and as a result they were not only altering the character of the relationship which existed between the Vedic and Āgamic cults but between the latter and the bhakti cult as well. For it would seem that the Tēvāram saints were responsible for raising the reputation of the Southern bhakti cult to a new level of social and cultural respectability. Contemporary bhakti groups appear to have been more ascetical, more eccentric, of a lower caliber and generally less esteemed. This can be gathered from the critical remarks of Mahendra Varman, the 7th century playwright-ruler who in his Sanskrit farce entitled "The Wild Pranks of a Drunkard,"[3]

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[1] Appar quoted by C. Jesudasan. Ibid. pp.77

[2] Romila Thapar, A History of India, p. 188.

[3] In Sanskrit: Mattavilāsa Prahasana.

ridiculed degenerate Buddhist śramaṇas and Śaiva bhaktas. Two specific groups of Śaiva bhaktas are singled out, the Kāpālikas and the Pāśupatas.

The Kāpālikas were a low-ranking order of mendicants which was distinguished by its ascetical practices rather than its philosophical views. Its members would adorn themselves with garlands made of human bones and carry human skulls as begging bowls.[1] In the play the Kāpālin, Satyasoma, is portrayed praising Śiva, who ordained drink for his devoted followers, and dallying with his sweetheart as he dances from tavern to tavern collecting wine in his skull alms-bowl.

The Pāśupatas were another order of Śaiva mendicants and they, too, were associated with certain eccentric ascetic practices such as living in cemeteries, offering wine and blood to the Bhairava form of Śiva, and generally acting like madmen. In the Mattavilāsa of Mahēndravarman, the Pāśupata, Babhrukalpa, is depicted as a fool and biased rogue who seeks to avenge his grievance against the Kāpālika who lured away his female companion.

Since the characters in the satire were drawn from the contemporary scene, this assessment may be taken as

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[1]Anandagiri, who was a contemporary of Śankara refers to two schools of Kāpālikas, one Brahmin and the other non-Brahmin. To the former belonged those who renounced such eccentric practices including the discarding of the kapāla (skulls). Jash, History of Śaivism, pp. 65-66.

being representative of the thinking of the more educated members of the Tamil society. "From descriptions of Buddhists and Kāpālikas provided by Hieun Tsang who visited the region in the 7th century we know that our author had drawn his characters from the contemporary scene."[1] From the Tēvāram hymns we can also determine that the Kāpālikas, Pāśupatas or yet another sect, the Kalamukhas had centers not only in Mahēndra's capital of Kañci but also in Tiruvorriyūr, Mayilapūr (in Madras), Kotumpālūr and certain parts of the districts of Tanjore and Trichinopoly.[2]

While Mahēndravarman mocked the shortcomings of these sects, the Tēvāram poets focused on the ideal image of the Kāpāla as the dancer-companion of the Lord (7.98.1). By placing such a positive mystic interpretation on their unusual behavior the composers of the Tēvāram can be said to have paved the way for promoting some understanding and appreciation of the symbolic import of their otherwise alienating practices. The tradition of earlier Tamil bhaktas was also given prominence in the works of these poet-saints despite the fact that the former had neither Vedic nor Āgamic affiliations and not infrequently worshipped in a manner that was abhorrent to both cults. Although such

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[1] Mattavilāsa Prahasana, N. P. Unni, translator (Trivandrum, India: College Book House, 1974), p. 17.

[2] C. Meenakshi, Administration and Social Life Under the Pallavas (Madras: University of Madras, 1938), p. 181.

non-conformist bhaktas were only individual exceptions and, therefore, could be more easily tolerated or overlooked in more orthodox circles, they were explicitly praised as exemplars of the loving devotion which transcended the propriety of external forms. In other words, the Tēvāram saints should be viewed as leaders in the drive to spread a Tamil version of bhakti but not as typical representatives of the bhakta (Tml.: pattar) groups that were or had been active in the South. Rather they were learned, non-extremist charismatic individuals who were helping to elevate the Tamil expression of emotional bhakti to a highly respected form of Śaiva worship even as they sought to revive the Brahmanical tradition over and against the Jain and Buddhist sects.

But in inspiring such a major reassessment of the nature of the relationship existing among the members of the Vedic, Āgamic and Southern bhakti cults, the Tēvāram saints were raising some new and controversial issues which were to make various segments of the Hindu community more conscious of the differences that divided them. Though the composers of the hymns looked upon Śaivism as a federation of sects,[1] it would take some doing to persuade followers of the different Śaiva groups to adopt a similar outlook. There would be a need (a) for a systematic formulation of this position,

[1]Rangaswamy, Religion and Philosophy, vol. I, p. 383.

(b) for a program of spiritual guidance that would prepare individuals to accept one another for the sake of the Lord and finally (c) to institutionalize this unifying vision in such a way that it would continue to captivate and inspire the religious imagination. It is against the background of these threefold concerns that the contribution of Tirumūlar can be appreciated. For it was his task to mediate intra-community differences by explicating the metaphysical, moral and mystical aspects of Āgamic Śaivism in a more self-conscious and systematic way.

In the 4th chapter we will explore Mūlar's description of the divisions within the Śaiva community, the vision he proposes for positive acceptance of differences and the way in which he sought to communicate his understanding to those who would be exposed to his Garland of Sacred Mantras. The bulk of our references will be to those portions of the text which contain mythic reference, but since it cannot be assumed that the Tirumantiram is well known outside of South India, we will begin with some general remarks on the text as a whole.

III. THE TEXT

LINKS WITH THE SANSKRIT AND TAMIL TRADITIONS

In the pāyiram of the Tirumantiram the author refers to his work as a Tamil śāstra,[1] a Tamil Āgama[2] and as a garland of mantras (mantra mālai).[3] These designations, particularly the last two, are significant for us because they link Mūlar's treatise with the Vedic, Āgamic and Tamil bhakti traditions even as they signal a breakthrough in the way those terms were traditionally understood. The continuity and contrast becomes apparent when any one of these appellations is considered more closely.

As Mantra

The word 'mantra' is derived from the Sanskrit root 'man' (to think) combined with 'tra,' the suffix of instrumentality. It has variously been defined as an "instrument of thought or speech, as a sacred text, a prayer or song of praise and as a Vedic hymn or sacrificial formula,"[4] In Brahmanical circles, however, the word mantra had become synonymous with the latter and, even prior to the onset of

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[1] TM 97c

[2] TM 105d

[3] TM 96c

[4] Monier-Williams, A Sanskrit-English Dictionary, (London: Oxford University Press, 1899), Reprinted 1956, 1960, 1964, 1970.

the Christian era, was commonly used to distinguish the hymn portions of the Vedas from the ritual-oriented Brāhmaṇa and philosophical-oriented Upaniṣadic portions.

The Tirumantiram acknowledges this usage of the term mantra each time it refers to Brahmans (Vētiyar) as those who recite (ōti) the four Vedas (nānmarai). Yet Tirumūlar himself does not over-emphasize the repetitive aspects of mantras. Instead, he introduces the latter as instruments of instruction designed to provoke a critical examination of the ethical life, ritual practice, yogic discipline and philosophical understanding of Śaivism. According to our author it is good to offer a garland of hymns (mantra mālai) to the Lord in song but it is even better to grasp the true import, the mey porul of those sacred strains:

> Those who speak many prayers and praises
> Without having thoughtfully pondered within
> their heart, will wither away.[1]

Defining mantra as that which leads the mind to perfect single-focused concentration (manam oruvalippattatu mantiram), Mūlar views a mantra as both a sādhana or means of realization and as the first fruit born of that realization. In a broad sense, then, the 3000 verses of the Tirumantiram were individually and collectively to be regarded as mantras.

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[1] tutipala tōttiran collaval lārum
matiyilar neñcinuḷ vāṭukiṉ ṟārē. (TM 33c,d).

When the term is used in the more restricted technical sense to designate specific verbal formulas, one in particular is singled out by Mūlar, namely the Pañcāksara (five-lettered) mantra which consists of the syllables 'na-ma-ci-vā-ya.'

> There are 7000 mantras
> Yet none of these mantras are equal to this one
> (i.e., the unspoken Pañcāksara)
> (TM 900 ab)

Here, too, the author has his own contribution to make. Whereas the Brahman preservers of the Vedas were attentive to the matter of correct pronunciation and were keen to specify who may or may not hear or utter the sacred hymns, the yogi author of the Tirumantiram sets forth mantras that are accessible to a wide variety of groups. Even though the mantras are looked upon as the holy body of the Lord Civan tirumēni), no restriction is placed on who may utter them. Instead stress is laid on the inner attitude of the devotee, on the disposition of the heart and the focus of the mind. When the mind and heart are properly directed toward Śiva, the recitation becomes efficacious even when it is performed silently:

> niṉaintu ōtum cakāram
> maṟippatu mantiram maṉṉiya nātam
> maṟappaṟa yōkikku aṟaneri yāmē.
>
> It is the duty of the yogi
> Never to forget the Lord
> While contemplating on the Asa (i.e., unspoken Pañcāksara) mantiram.
> (TM 731 bcd)

Again, those who would achieve peace by repeating the mantra are urged to give themselves over to the practice of anpu and not simply to rely on a mechanical recital of the words or syllables. Thus we read in Tirumantiram verse 739:

> If you practice love (anpu)...there will be
> An end to repeated births. Becalm yourself
> Repeating the Asabhai (i.e., unspoken) mantiram.

In these verses we have a clear example of how the yogi author favors the tantric[1] understanding of mantra which is not linked to the performance of sacrificial rituals. It can also be seen how he deliberately and explicitly connects himself with the Tamil bhakti tradition wherein the recitation of the Pañcākṣara and the theme of anpu were both central.

In the Tirumantiram, however, the Pañcākṣara mantra is not only associated with the bhakti motif, it is also presented as the sacred formula which encapsulates the spiritual essence of the Vedas and the Āgamas and thus forms the bond between them:

> aimpatu eḻuttē aṉaittu vētaṅkaḷum
>
> aimpatu eḻuttē aṉaittu akamaṅkaḷum
>
> aimpatu eḻutatēyum āvatu aṟintapiṉ
>
> aimpatu eḻuttum pōy añcu eḻuttāmē.
>
> The 50 letters (along with Om) constitute all the Vedas.
> The 50 letters (along with Om likewise) constitute all the Āgamas.

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[1] Tantric principles and practices are distinguished by their microcosmic or yogic orientation which regards the body as the locus of power and ritual activity. In this study, the term tantra is used to designate a non-Vedic sectarian tradition in line with that of the Āgamas. For further discussion see Thomas Hopkins, The Hindu Religious Tradition (California: Dickerson Publishing Company, 1971), pp. 112-115.

Having realized this truth, (one, will see that)
The fifty letters merge in the five (i.e., the
Pañcākṣara).[1]
(TM 965)

What is particularly striking about Mūlar's presentation of the Pañcākṣara is that it explicitly encourages devotees to visualize the formless five-lettered mantra by meditating upon the cosmic dance of Śiva as the iconic representation of those sacred syllables:

The (hand) holding the drum, that (hand) which
is swinging over,
That (which refreshes like) flowing water, the
hand holding
The fire, the lotus-like foot treading on the
proud one-
Understand these (to symbolize) the formless
'civāyanama.'
(TM 2798)

In the forthcoming chapter we will examine the mystic import of this cosmic dance of the Naṭarāj. Here, it is simply my intention to indicate how broadly the term mantra is used in the Tirumantiram and to show that even when Mūlar employs the term in a more restricted sense, he is concerned with increasing the knowledge (arivu) and understanding (jñāna) of religious practices. This distinguishes Mūlar's approach from other efforts which the Indian historian S. N. Dasgupta criticizes when he writes: "Belief in the efficacy

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[1] A similar statement is found in the Unmai Vilakkam:

The five letters form the Āgamas and Vedas dear,
the five letters form the Purāṇas, all of yore,
The five letters form Śiva's dance of ecstasy
And the far off unceasing calm of mukti free.
(U. V. 44)

of mantra and other elements of the esoteric practices as the easiest means for attaining salvation retarded the growth of spiritual ideas."[1] In the case of the Tirumantiram, such a charge cannot be defended. For, as W. H. Schomerus has pointed out, the Tirumantiram is the earliest known work to have "made the philosophical ideas of the Āgamas accessible to the Tamil-speaking population of Southern India."[2]

In summary then, it can be said that, for Mūlar, mantras were the sādhana (means) of realization and the first fruit of that achievement. As sādhana, the verses individually and collectively serve as instruments of knowledge as well as of practice. As the fruit of realization, the mantric insights came to be expressed in various verbal, mental and visual forms, not the least of which was the descriptive imagery of Śiva's dance. In both instances, it can be seen that the restrictive Vedic or Nigama usage of the word mantra has given way to a more inclusive usage which encompasses Vedic hymns, Upaniṣadic knowledge, tantric (āgamic) yoga practices, Purāṇic imagery and bhakti recitations.

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[1]Quoted by Agehananda Bharati, The Tantric Tradition (Calcutta: B. I. Publications, 1965), p. 108.

[2]"The Sources of Our Presentation of the System of Śiva Siddhānta," Śaiva Siddhānta, vol. 1, no. 4, p. 315.

As Āgama

A similar effort to extend the usage of the word 'Āgama' can also be detected in the Tirumantiram. In the broadest sense, of course, Āgama simply means 'that which has come' or 'that which has been handed down' and as such, it is a generic term which designated a wide range of non-Vedic religious and philosophical literature. It was commonly employed to distinguish certain bodies of sacred writings from that of the Vedas which were subsequently referred to as Nigamas. Buddhists adopted this nomenclature[1] and later Jain polemical writings were called Jināgama. When used in a more theistic context, Āgama came to mean 'that which has been revealed (by the deity)' and thus could be applied to the sacred texts of the Śaktas and Vaiṣṇavas as well as the Śaivas. Adherents of Śāktism and Vaiṣṇavism, however, are adamant about referring to their scriptures as tantras and samhitas, respectively. Among these theistic cults, it is only the followers of Śiva who specifically adopt the term Āgama to designate their body of scriptures:

> The only real books are the Vedas and the Śivāgamas (the Śāiva Books)
> (C.N.C. 267)

In this section, we will be concerned with the Śaiva understanding of Āgama and with Mūlar's modification of the language, format, content and literary forms traditionally

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[1] Tripidagāgama - Tripiṭaka

associated with Śivāgamas.

The first point to be made is that the topics and themes treated in the Tirumantiram were not novel but were, for the most part, drawn from an existing Āgama tradition. Our knowledge of the presence of this non-Vedic tradition derives from several sources. Although the classical (Caṅkam) literature of the Tamils makes no mention of the existence of Āgamic texts as such, it does contain descriptions of Āgamic practices associated with the worship of images. The earliest references to Āgamic texts begin to emerge in the Tamil hymns of the Śaiva bhakti saints who lived in the South between the 7th and 9th centuries. It is to this period that the composition of the Tirumantiram may be tentatively assigned. As the following exerpts from the verses of Appar, Campantar and Cuntarar show, the allusions made by these bhakti poets were brief and add little to our knowledge of the structure or content of these writings.

> My tongue will continue to utter the Āgamas
> in the presence of its companion (the mind).
> (Appar 129.1)

> If we go to Tirukkōkaraṉam we will see Śivāgamas
> (aran ākamam).
> (Campantar 3.79.6)

> They are praising the Lord of Tiruvārṟiyūr
> who is the wealth of the Āgamas (ākama celvanārai)
> (Campantar 3.57.10)

Indeed he is the mother, giving grace
to one who preserves the wisdom of the Āgamas.
(Cuntarar 7.96.6)

He is the language of the Āgamic scriptures
for the sake of the world.
(Cuntarar 7.84.8)

Turning to the extant Āgamas which have been made available in print only in the last century, we find that these works are Sanskrit compositions which have been preserved in the Grantha[1] script. In general, these works may be described as manuals of religious instruction which, seeking to explicate the nature of the three eternal verities (mupporul) of pati (the Lord), pāśu (the soul) and pāśam (the fetters of matter), espoused an integrated form of religious practice designed to wean souls from their attachment to matter in order to free them for their ultimate union with Śiva. The instruction was progressive and it seems that many of the texts were divided into four sections or padas.[2] Each section dealt with one aspect of the

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[1]Grantha script was the main script employed throughout Tamilnad for Prakrit and Sanskrit writings.

[2]Of the seven Āgamas available in print today, only the Suprabheda, Mṛgendra, and Kiraṇa contain all four padas

Subryeda: kriyā, caryā, yoga, vidyā
Kiraṇa: vidyā, kriyā, caryā, yoga
Mṛgendra: vidyā, yoga, kriyā, caryā

Raurava Āgama contains 2 sections, vidyā and kriyā. Others like Ajit, Kāmika and Kāraṇa contain only the kriyā pada. For further details regarding the content of specific Āgamas, see M. Arunachalam, "The Śaiva Āgamas," Śaiva Siddhānta, vol. 3, no. 2, pp. 90-112, and J. Gonda, Medieval Religious Literature (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1977), chapters

fourfold teachings on daily religious observances (caryā), ritual worship (kriyā), yogic discipline (yoga), and Śaiva doctrine (vidyā). The subject matter of individual Āgamas varies but the above-mentioned themes characterize these works as a whole and thus provide an initial basis for making a general comparison with the Tirumantiram.

Like the Tēvāram poets, Mūlar mentions the existence of Śivāgamas:

> All the following (things of the temple) constitute
> The liṅga: the pearls, precious stones,
> The beads of coral, the carved wood, the stone image,
> The Āgama of the Father (attaṉ ākama)...
> (TM 1719)

Unlike the verses of Appar and others, however, the composition of Tirumūlar not only refers to the Āgamas, it is the earliest Tamil work to reflect their theology in a systematic way. What distinguishes the Tirumantiram even further is the creative way in which it reworks traditional Āgamic material and restructures the traditional Āgamic format.

STRUCTURE OF THE TEXT

The Tirumantiram is divided into nine chapters which are designated by the term 'tantra,' a Sanskrit word meaning 'that which is spread out' or 'that which extends (knowledge).' In Sanskrit works, the word tantra is often used

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XI and XII.

interchangeably with the word Āgama. This can be seen when a given Āgama records its transmission under a section headed "tantra avatāra patalam," that is, a section concerning the descent of the tantra. In the Tirumantiram these terms also occur together.

> In 9 tantras and 3000 (mantras)
> He expounded the beautiful Āgama.
> (TM 105cd)

In terms of content, it is clear that Mūlar was referring to well-established Āgamic practices and beliefs. Structure-wise, however, it is difficult to see how these nine tantras can be brought into line either with the traditional fourfold schema evident in the extant Āgamas or with the threefold one recognized by our sage.[1] For the nine tantras tend to deal with separate topics which are so clearly delineated that one South Indian scholar remarked, "there appears, at the outside, to be no connection between one tantra and another."[2]

There are at least two ways of responding to such a characterization. One way would be to acquiesce and accept K. Zvelebil's assessment of the Tirumantiram as a collection of "self-contained solitary stanzas" that are united by

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[1]According to the TM 1429, the Āgamas are 28 in number, come from 9 manifestations of Rudra and are divided into 3 parts; i.e., karma (rites), upāsana (worship or service) and jñāna (knowledge).

[2]Ayyar, Origin and Early History, pp. 229, 230.

"a fundamental unity of thought and motivation"[1] but with no necessary connection or ordered sequence occurring between the individual verses. Another response would be to show that each of the nine tantras are merely summaries of given Āgamas such as the 9 listed in verse 73[2] of the Tirumantiram.

The latter suggestion was made by the commentator V. V. Ramana Sastri who has a vested interest in linking the Tirumantiram exclusively with the great Sanskrit tradition. It is an attempt to rule out the possibility that the Tirumantiram was a creative effort which entailed the reworking of the Sanskrit Āgamic tradition in light of the Tamil culture of the South. Since K. Zvelebil's comments will be challenged in the forthcoming chapters, I will address my remarks here to the opinion expressed by Ramana Sastri. Aside from the fact that there is good reason to believe that the 73rd verse was a later interpolation,[3]

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[1]Tamil Literature, p. 55.

[2]The Āgamas received (from the Lord) are the Kāraṇam,
Kāmikam,
The good Vīram, the lofty Cintam, the Vātulam,
The Viyāmalam and the Kālōttaram,
The Cuppiram and crowned by the Makutam
(TM 73)

[3]Mr. K. Vajravelu Mudaliar is of the opinion that this verse has been interpolated in order to give credence to the existence of 28 Āgamas. He arrived at this position after examining several Tamil lexicographies called Nikaṇḍu. Although the latter are definite about the number of Vedas,

Sastri's proposal is doubtful on three counts. First of all, the verse in question merely lists the nine Āgamas and gives no support to the thesis that they can be placed in a one to one correspondence with the tantras of the Tirumantiram. Secondly, all of the Āgamas mentioned in this stanza are not available for perusal and therefore it is impossible to corroborate such speculation. Lastly, the topics treated in the extant Āgamas are so diverse that any attempt to correlate the latter with the subject matter covered in the individual tantras of the Tirumantiram could only be arbitrary or forced.

My own position with regard to understanding Mūlar's usage of the term Āgama is more in line with that of T. V. Sadāśiva Pandarthar,[1] a Tamil scholar who was of the opinion that the nine tantras of the Tirumantiram were modelled after individual Āgamas only in a broader, more general sense. A brief survey of the nine chapters will indicate the distribution of subject matter and provide a framework for discussing how the mythic material incorporated into the treatise reflects the overall thrust of this work.

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aṅgas, Purāṇas, Upapurāṇas and smrtis, they remain silent over the number of Āgamas. These works are dated from the ninth century and later. (Letter received from Mr. Mudaliar, Maturai Kamaraj University, Dept. of Philosophy, Dec.5, 1978.)

[1]A History of Tamil Literature (250-600 A.D.), (Annamalainagar: Annamalai University, 1957), pp. 82, 83.

GENERAL CONTENT

Tantra one opens with a celebration of the divine instruction (upatēsam) which reveals that the purpose of creation is to provide a milieu wherein souls (pāśu) may be educated to move beyond attachment to matter (pāśam) in order to acquire true knowledge of the one Lord (pati) who is love (Tml. anpu). Qualifications for entering the path of realization are also outlined. Actions to be avoided and virtues to be cultivated are designated 'aram' (Skt. dharma) yet the religious incentive for regulating one's conduct is linked not to vidhi (religious injunctions) but to meditation on the transitory nature of earthly existence. The soul's anticipated awakening is attributed to the grace (Tml. arul) of Śiva. Those who are prepared to understand and accept that grace are contrasted with spiritual illiterates (Tml. kallātār). Various daily observances (caryā) and ritual practices (kriyā), including the fire-sacrifice (āhuti) performed by those who know the Vedas, are acknowledged as stepping stones to the attainment of truth (unmai) provided they are performed with patti (Skt. bhakti). This tantra has 224 verses.

Chapter two introduces a number of Śaivite myths which were popular among followers of the various cults - Vedic, Āgamic and bhakti. Then there follows a lengthy description of a central Āgamic doctrine, the Pañcakṛtya

or five-fold cosmic functions of the Lord. Five sections are set aside to comment on each of these functions which include creation (srsti), preservation (sthiti), destruction (samhāra), obscuration (tirobhāva) and the descent of grace (anugraha). The remaining 12 sections of the chapter touch on the development of the human embryo, the condition of different classes of embodied souls (sakalar) and a variety of popular and temple-related practices. It has 212 verses.

The third tantra begins with a fairly detailed presentation of the basics for the eight-limbed (astāṅga) yoga of Patañjali. While the inclusion of the niyama (proscriptions) and yama (prescriptions) is in keeping with Mūlar's commitment to bringing out the ethical demands of religious life, it distinguishes the Tirumantiram from the Śivāgamas where the yogapada forms the briefest section of the text and where it is more usual to find a description of only six limbs (aṅgas).[1] Mūlar's presentation can also be distinguished from that found in the Yoga Sūtra, for although eight limbs are discussed, our yogi does not stress the final cessation of consciousness (nirodha) but, instead, speaks of union with Śiva (TM 739). The latter is portrayed

[1]The six are: the holding back of the mind from objects of sense (pratyahāra), meditation (dhyāna), breath-control (prāṇāyāma), concentration on particular objects (dhāraṇā), speculation (tarka), becoming one with the object (samādhi). Yama and niyama are omitted.

as a yoga qualified by love (anpu). Here the body is described as a temple wherein the devotee experiences the bliss of the Lord who is the revealer of the Vedas as well as the Āgamas. The Pañcākṣara or five-lettered mantra (i.e, namacivāya) is praised as the vehicle of realization. There are 725 verses in this chapter.

The fourth tantra explains the practice of Śiva yoga also known as mantra yoga, which requires the aid of various mandalas or mystical diagrams and breath control. This is perhaps the most difficult section for the uninitiated to appreciate. Here mantras are described as diverse forms of śakti and particular emphasis is placed on the importance of the asabai (unspoken) mantra which is regarded as the silent counterpart of the Pañcākṣara mantra. References are also made to the Lord's cosmic dance and to the glories of the Divine śakti (energy) who is viewed as that part of the Lord that revealed the Vedic truths and authored the Pañcakṛtyas (the fivefold cosmic acts). There are 535 verses.

The fifth tantra provides a resumé of the main features of the different Śaiva schools; distinguishing them, in turn, from various unspecified religious sects. Rejecting the orthodox tendency to propose a hiatus between karma kanda and jñāna kanda, that is, between knowledge and action, this chapter recommends participation in the four graded steps of caryā, kriyā, yoga, and vidyā or jñāna.

This tantra, which contains 154 verses, stresses the importance of caryā and recommends these practices for all regardless of caste or class. Similarly, the goals to be attained are correlated not with social positions but with spiritual dispositions.

In the sixth tantra, Śiva is shown to be the Guru who alone enables the soul to discern that which is sat (Śivam) asat (bondage) and satasat (ātma or self), (TM 1573). This highest instruction is seen to come from within, from the heart-space where Śiva dwells. It is made clear that not all paths lead to the ultimate goal and that half-hearted efforts are self-defeating. The chapter concludes with a description of the characteristics of a deserving disciple. The latter is explicitly distinguished from the pretenders and other pseudo-jñānis who possess the externals of religion but are lacking in motivation and knowledge. As Narayana Ayyar observes, the sixth tantra is essentially an illuminating exposé of the Śiva bhakti path. This chapter contains 131 verses.

The seventh chapter with 418 verses recounts the practical experiences of a yogi and thus forms a logical sequel to the instruction received from the guru in the previous tantra. This includes a general description of the six cakras or internal regions of the body that could be thought of as a micro-cosmic mandalam that could be utilized for meditation purposes. The purificiation of these centres is shown to

lead to the perception of five different liṅgas: the anda (world), pinda (body), Sadāśiva guru (manifested god-form), ātma (self) and jñāna (the liṅgam of knowledge). It also leads to the appreciation of Āgamic practices such as Śiva-pūjā, guru-pūjā and Mahēśvara pūjā.

The eighth tantra containing 527 verses details the states of consciousness such as waking, sleeping, dreamless sleep, etc. which are associated with advanced understanding and the disappearance of all impurities especially the cessation of all thought of egotistic agency. It is in this section that we find Vedic, Āgamic and bhakti elements explicitly reconciled in the most unequivocal terms as the end of the Veda. That is, the Vedānta, is said to concur with Siddhānta even as these systems merge in love (i.e., God) which is the object (ñeya) of knowledge (TM 2382).

The ninth tantra concludes the work with a discourse on ultimate bliss, referred to as Śiva bhoga, which is enjoyed by the sanctified. This concluding chapter includes a moving description of the mythological cosmic dance of Śiva, the Naṭarāj, which comes to epitomize and symbolize the teachings presented throughout the treatise. It contains 397 verses.

STYLE OF THE TEXT

As this brief outline indicates, the Tirumantiram was not a tightly knit philosophical treatise but a manual of progressive religious instruction which was loosely

structured to facilitate commentary on the gamut of Āgamic practices and beliefs. Further, it was designed to reiterate themes on more than one level. Because of this, not all sections of the work are equally accessible to every reader. For instance, certain portions of the manual dealing with advance techniques in tantric yoga are deliberately written in guarded esoteric language[1] and, consequently, remain largely unintelligible to the uninitiated. Elsewhere in the text, problems of interpretation are raised by the frequent use of the numerals one, two, five, seven, nine, etc., which appears to be a favorite device of Tamil mystics known as sittars.[2] Unqualified, the numeral five may refer to the senses, but it may also be an allusion to the five

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[1]For example, verse 2872 reads:

> There is a plough to which three are yoked,
> with which a triangular field is ploughed.
> If they are properly directed, it will hit a pillar.
> Those who do not plough the field with folded tongue,
> they fetter their feet and plough barren salt land.

(According to the commentator, A. Visvanatha Pillai, the plough with the three (animals) refers to the life-breath that is inhaled, suspended and exhaled. The triangular field is the mūlādhāra. The pillar is the spinal cord. The folding of the tongue refers to a yogic practice. The import is that one needs a competent guru to perform yoga correctly).

[2]For example:

> The outgoing eight, the incoming eight, the aging chief, the nine gates, the serpentine (base), the twelve (inch) horse - will these function correctly if the driver does not control them?
> (TM 457)

See also Kamil V. Zvelebil, The Poets of the Powers (London: Rider and Company, 1972), pp. 17-24.

faces of Sadāśiva or to the five sacred letters (Pañcākṣara). In many stanzas the meaning is clear but not always.

Such opaqueness, however, is not characteristic of the work as a whole. According to P. Ramanatha Pillai, esoteric or ambiguous passages constitute barely 10% of the verses.[1] Yet this is not the image that has been projected by the incautious remarks of certain scholars. For example, when M. Dhavamony asserts that the Tirumantiram is a mystical treatise "written in simple style but its thought is rather abstruse,"[2] the impression is given that the text as a whole is abstruse. More misleading is K. A. Nilakanta Sastri's unsubstantiated remark that the Tirumantiram is reverenced by the Tamils "in spite of its almost unredeemed obscurity."[3] The consequence of such misinforming generalizations has been described by A. Visvanatha Pillai of Jaffna:

> This is a book that is avoided and not ordinarily studied by the generality of readers, due no doubt to a longstanding impression that

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[1] Tirumantiram (Tirunelveli, India: Śaiva Siddhānta Works Publishing Society, 1979; first published with Ramanatha Pillai's commentary in 1957), vol. I, p. 45.

[2] Love of God According to Śaiva Siddhānta (Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1971), p. 127.

[3] History of South India, p. 352. A decade later Sastri mitigated this harsh position when he reworded his description of the Tirumantiram in another of his works: "The poem is obscure in many parts; it is held in great veneration by Tamil Śaivas." The Development of Religion in South India (New Delhi: Orient Longmans, 1963), p. 45.

> it deals with matters too abstruse and difficult to be comprehended and fit to be studied by erudite scholars only.[1]

Reacting to this popular misconception, A. V. Pillai prepared an English translation of some 600 selected verses, comprising nearly one-fifth of the text, together with a commentary which is designed to demonstrate that the Tirumantiram is a largely intelligible document. In fact, any number of verses can be cited to show that Mūlar was concerned to present Āgamic Śaivism in terms that would be meaningful to a Tamil-speaking population. What A. V. Pillai understood and what K. A. N. Sastri overlooked was that Mūlar not only communicated in the language of the masses but that he took advantage of their idiom as well.

Thus, in contrast to the straightforward and rather pedantic style of the extant Śivāgamas, the Tirumantiram introduces themes in a more indirect or poetic way. It is not unusual to find profound teachings communicated with the aid of easily appreciated similes and poignant analogies drawn from native folk imagery. In one verse, for example, the Lord entering the body of a person at the time of conception is likened to a mother entering and taking charge of her household (TM 112). In another, an agricultural image is chosen. This occurs in verse 140 where the verb 'maṭaimārum,' generally used to denote the changing of the

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[1] Analysis of the Tirumantiram (Jaffna: Śivaprakāsa Press, 1967), p. 332.

course of irrigation rivulets in a field, is here employed to convey the notion of conversion, of turning to the Lord.

Elsewhere in matters pertaining to morality and social responsibility Mūlar, emphasizing the transient character of life, makes his point with witty satirizations of human behavior. The clarity and universality of the portrayal is unmistakable.

> The rich repast was laid and he dined and enjoyed
> With damsels sweet in amorous dalliance toyed.
> "A little, little pain - on the left," he moaned
> And laid himself to rest to be gathered to dust.
> (TM 148)

> The neighbors gathered wailing loud and long
> Removing his name, they call him "corpse"
> And bear him down to the burning ghat and
> burn the body;
> They immerse themselves ceremonially and then
> terminate remembrance of him.
> (TM 145)

Mūlar also incorporated a number of mythic episodes, drawn from popular Śaiva lore, to kindle a critical understanding of Āgamic Śaivism in "its metaphysical, moral and mystical aspects."[1] Charges of obscurity notwithstanding, the latter was even prepared to demythologize or, rather, to remythologize well-established narratives in order to bring out the spiritual meaning of a passage:[2]

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[1]K. Śivaraman, Śaivism, p. 31.

[2]Here Mūlar is making a critique of the understanding of the myth of the churning of the ocean where the devas sought to gain immortality by stirring up nectar (ambrosia) from the ocean. As they churned, deadly poison rose to the surface. The devas were frightened but Śiva appeared and consumed the poison. It is said that Pārvatī, his consort,

> People do not know the meaning of the darkness of the neck of the downward face (of Śiva) which sustains the universe and the eight directions.
> People without firsthand knowledge will say that what has been consumed by the one with the white garland and flowing matted hair, is poison.
>
> (TM 521)

From a pedagogical and exegetical standpoint, this mythic imagery is particularly significant not only because it utilizes a vehicle of religious instruction which was taken for granted by the followers of the Vedic, Āgamic and bhakti cults, but also because its polyvalent symbolism was implicated in the social, political and religious institutions of the Tamil South in a way that analogies drawn from folk motifs were not. In the process of examining the functions of mythic references in relation to both of these points, it should become clear that the Tirumantiram was an intelligible document of considerable social relevance, not an elite atemporal manual of esoteric instruction.

UNITY OF THE TEXT

From the foregoing remarks, it can be seen that the Tirumantiram incorporates material from a wide range of pan-Indian traditions - Vedic, Tantric (i.e., Āgamic), yogic and bhakti - as well as from the regional folk traditions

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held his throat and prevented it from being swallowed while the god Viṣṇu held Śiva's mouth to keep him from spitting it out. As a result the poison formed a blue mark on Śiva's throat.

of the South. What makes the Tirumantiram a difficult work to categorize, however, is the way in which the material has been gathered and presented. There appears to be a certain ad hoc character about the organization and distribution of the verses. Such an impression is given by the evident multiplicity of the topics and themes, the irregular juxtapositioning of popular and esoteric imagery and by a basic looseness in the structure of the text. It is further supported by the fact that this particular combination of features has not been found in earlier Sanskrit or Tamil writings, whether they be traditional Śivāgamas, classical Yoga Sūtras, Purāṇas, Śāstras or popular devotional hymns. This, in turn, makes it difficult to see how Mūlar's treatise can be regarded as a unified whole and it has led at least one Tamil scholar to suggest that the Tirumantiram might be thought of as an anthology of verses composed by the yogī sage at different times over long intervals and collected later by some other poet.[1]

According to this position, the Tirumantiram is not to be looked upon as a unified work that has been guided by some overall design but, rather, as "a compilation of certain prevailing ideas about ethics, doctrines of Śaiva

[1]This suggestion has been put forward by A. V. Subramana Iyer in The Poetry and the Philosophy of Sittars (Cidambaram: Maṇivāsakar Noolakam, 1969), p. 13.

Āgamas and the occult science of yoga based mainly on the Yogaśāstras and the Mantra Śāstras found in Sanskrit literature and on his personal experience."[1] A. V. Subramana Iyer favors this view because he finds it useful for explaining the presence of "certain noticeable repetitions and inconsistencies and a difference in emphasis on the same subject dealt with in various cantos."[2] Here the question of textual unity is no longer entertained.

The difficulty with this assessment is that it assumes that repetitions and variations on a given theme would not be found in the Tirumantiram if the latter were a unified work. This does not solve the matter; it only raises the question about what is to be regarded as normative for evaluating this kind of text. It also leads us to ask whether there isn't another way of thinking about the text that would allow us to discover (not manufacture) an underlying unity which otherwise might be overlooked.

With this goal in mind, I suggest that while the Tirumantiram does not seem to have been patterned after any body of early Sanskrit or Tamil literature, it does reflect the freelance style and critical stance of another living tradition, namely that of a group of South Indian mystics

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[1]Ibid., p. 11 (emphasis added).

[2]Ibid., p. 13.

known as siddhas (Tml. cittar). This group of sages, to which Mūlar himself apparently belonged,[1] was recognized in the Tēvāram hymns as being composed of committed followers of Śiva.[2] Traditionally, the sittars remained outside of the main stream of the southern bhakti movement and their religious activity was such that it could be distinguished from that of the bhaktas. Mūlar himself seems to acknowledge the difference when he writes:

pāṭaval lārneṟi pāṭa aṟikilēṉ
āṭaval lārneṟi āta aṟikilēṉ
nāṭaval lārneṟi nāṭa aṟikilēṉ
tēṭaval lārneṟi tēṭakillēṉē

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[1] celkiṉṟa vāṟṟi civamuṉi cittacaṉ
velkiṉṟa ñāṉattu mikkōr muṉivarāyp
palkiṉṟa tēvar acurar narar tampāl
olkiṉṟa vāṉvaḻi yūṭuvan tēṉē

While contemplating Śiva on the path of true knowledge
I became a sage of desire-conquering wisdom.
Passing through the midst of the devas, asuras and men,
I came by way of the subtle celestial path.
(TM 83)

See also verses 284 and 1490.

[2] pattar sittar palar ēttum paraman paḻaiyaṉūr
mēya attaṉ

(Śiva) is the) Lord who is praised by many bhaktas and sittars.
(Tēvāram 7.52.10)

Also 7.88.7.

I do not know to sing the way singers do.
I do not know to dance the way dancers do.
I do not know to seek the way (intellectual)
seekers do
I do not search the way (other) searchers do.
(TM 96)

Here the first two lines may be taken as referring to the bhaktas. While a bhakta was viewed as one who was trying to reach the Lord, a siddha was looked upon as one who had perceived and known the Lord. In practical terms, however, the difference between them was more a matter of method than of theological substance. On the latter they were basically in agreement. This explains why Tirumūlar, as an early representative of the siddha movement, was inclined to combine bhakti tendencies with yogic practices. This is evident, for example, in his critique of those who lack either bhakti (Tml.: patti) or simple yogic self-discipline.[1] Though their methods differ, these groups were clearly united in their mutual opposition to caste, Brahmanical pretensions, excessive ritualism and exaggerated emphasis on the externals of religion which drew the individual's attention away from the Lord who dwells within.

In addition to having personally integrated the religious streams of bhakti and yoga, the siddhas also had their own way of incorporating elements of the latter into their understanding of the philosophical tradition of the Āgamas. The breadth of the Tamil siddha movement has been commented

[1] TM 231.

on by K. Zvelebil who writes that they were

> part of a very general tradition, well-spread in space and time in medieval India - the tradition of the siddhāchāryas, who are, again, part of a larger āgamic, tantric and yogic tradition of India.[1]

The siddhas were eclectic in their assimilation of these diverse traditions and it is this eclecticism which is reflected in their poetry and gives the latter its distinctive character. This is true of the writings of the later siddhas like Sivavākkiyar and Pattinattar but it is especially evident in the earliest of the siddha works to have surfaced, namely, in the Tirumantiram of Tirumūlar. The latter reflects the eclectic character of the siddha tradition in several ways:

(a) operating within the context of a broad Āgamic framework, the Tirumantiram seeks to creatively harmonize elements drawn from several different religious streams including the Upaniṣadic, the yogic and the Tamil bhakti;

(b) it offers a critical commentary on various facets of the general Āgamic tradition;

(c) unlike the Śaivāgamas which were gathered and preserved in Sanskrit by priests who were primarily interested in them as manuals of temple and temple-related rituals, the Tirumantiram was composed in Tamil by a yogi sage who was primarily concerned with elucidating the philosophical and spiritual meaning of the Āgamas;

(d) again, in contrast to the Śaivāgamas which emphasized the kriyā (ritual) and caryā (religious discipline) aspects of the Āgamic tradition, the Tirumantiram placed greater stress on the vidyā (doctrinal) and yoga (self-disciplinary) aspects.

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[1] The Smile of Murukan, p. 220.

When Mūlar's treatise is reconsidered with these points in mind, it becomes possible to recognize a definite and well-thought out pattern in the way themes are progressively elaborated throughout the text. The basic thematic unity of the text then becomes apparent on the philosophical level where an attempt is made to clarify how the various Āgamic beliefs and practices, whether metaphysical, ethical, ritual or ascetical, were fundamentally rooted in and directed toward knowledge of Śiva. Crucial to the project and its dissemination would be a rethinking of the social and spiritual significance of Śaiva mythology. The unity of the text can also be seen on the level of orthopraxis (yoga) where practical guidance for cooperating with the liberating grace (śakti) of Śiva is geared to draw disciples into community with one another even as they are drawn deeper into the realization of union with Śiva. On one level, the treatise moves from a discussion of general Śaiva doctrine concerning the purposefulness of creation to an examination of the religious attitudes, practices and dispositions needed to recognize this salvific process, to a discussion of the importance of having a guru who awakens this understanding and, finally, to a nuanced reflection on the nature of the ultimate experience of union which is expressed in the mythological imagery of the cosmic dance. On another complementary level, Mūlar's treatise provides a parallel line of

discourse which begins with a presentation of the ethical preconditions for discipleship, the practical disciplines and techniques for recognizing the presence of the Lord within the individual, the methods of the guru who is to direct the disciple and instructions for achieving the final purification of the soul.

When the Tirumantiram is viewed in this way as a graded manual of religious instruction wherein Āgamic teachings are critically presented on more than one level in order to meet the spiritual needs of more or less mature devotees, then the repetition of themes and of certain phrases can be interpreted accordingly. That is, instead of viewing them as indications of a disjointed text which has been compiled by a second party, one can liken them to motifs in a musical score which are slightly varied as they reappear in a new context throughout the various sections of the composition. Rather than hinder or interrupt the cohesiveness of the treatise, the loosely structured format actually facilitates this process of bringing out more and more subtle nuances of the teachings.

Given these considerations, it seems highly improbable that anyone other than Mūlar was responsible for the basic arrangement of the text. This evaluation does not rule out the possibility of an extended period of composition or the likelihood of subsequent additions and

interpolations. What it does imply is that there was a central vision which guided the composition of the text and that this determined the overall distribution of the material found in the Tirumantiram. Since such a position assumes the basic authenticity of the verses which have been handed down by the Śaiva tradition, it is important, at this point, to address this question more directly. Having completed this task, we will then proceed to consider the nature of the vision which unifies the Tirumantiram and how this is reflected in the mythic material which has been incorporated into the text.

ESTABLISHING THE TEXT

Textual controversies surrounding the Tirumantiram take shape around two related issues; one concerning the exact number of verses contained in the original treatise and the other concerning the authenticity of the 112 quatrains found in the pāyiram (preface). The quest for determining the exact number of verses has been spurred on by the acceptance of a popular legend which describes how the yogi saint awoke from samādhi once each year to weave a single verse into his garland of mantras, and that this continued over a period of 3000 years. The legend can be traced to a passage found in Cēkkiḻār's Periya Purāṇa:

> He adorned (the Lord) with a garland of verses (mantra mālai), of 3000 Tamil (verses).

> Accordingly, remaining happily for 3000 years
> on this earth, by the grace of the Lord he
> returned to Kailāsa.
> (Periya Purāṇa 3590)

This account, in turn, appears to be the hagiographer's way of elaborating on details found in several verses of the Tirumantiram, especially the following:

> Mūlaṉ uraiceyta mūvāyiram Tamiḻ
> Mūlaṉ uraiceyta munnūṟu mantiram
> Mūlaṉ uraiceyta muppatu upatēcam
> Mūlaṉ uraiceyta mūṉṟum oṉrāmē
>
> The 3000 Tamil (songs) recited by Mūlar
> The 300 mantirams (verses) recited by Mūlar
> The 30 upatēcam (teachings) recited by Mūlar
> And the 3 recited by Mūlar, (these are all) one.
> (TM 3046)

Since there is no evidence that Mūlar left other writings besides the Tirumantiram, some scholars have maintained that the stanzas referred to in lines b, c, and d were most likely incorporated into certain sections within the text. The 'three' mentioned in line d is thought to describe the three laudatory hymns, two of which introduce the text, and a third with which it concludes. The 30 upatēcam or instructional stanzas may be identified with the first section of tantra one which bears the heading upatēcam and contains exactly 30 verses. It is somewhat more difficult to isolate the 300 mantras of line b, but they are thought to have been included in the fourth tantra

called mantra-yokam.[1] Finally, something must be said about the numerical description of the text as a whole. Both the Tirumantiram and the tradition popularized by the Periya Purāna refer to the work as a garland of 3000 hymns. Yet all but one of the editions mentioned previously contain no fewer than 3047 quatrains. The editions of M. V. Visvanatha Pillai, Dandapani Desikar and G. Varadarajan include 3047 verses, that of the Tiruppanandal Math 3081 verses, and that of the Mahāsamajam 3069 verses.[2] In addition, scholars have unearthed as many as 70 verses not found in existing printed editions, but which have been culled from other treatises or ascribed to Mūlar by tradition.[3] When

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[1]Having noted that one unidentified scholar associates the 300 mantras with the following numbers (914-1002, 1075-1124, 1255-1418), A. Visvanatha Pillai (of Jaffna) alternately suggests that the mantras in question correspond to the last seven sections of the fourth chapter and that these should be distinguished from the basic 3000. An Analysis of the Tirumantiram (Jaffna: Śaivaprakāsa Press, 1967), p. 331.

[2]According to K. Vajravelu Mudaliar, Special officer of Śaiva Siddhānta Philosophy at Maturai Kamaraj University, old manuscripts of the TM which were once housed in the library at Tiruvadaturai (the site where Mūlar is said to have composed his treatise), have since been 'borrowed' and are difficult to track down. But of those that are still available, even they exceed 3000 verses. Two copies written on palm leaves have been preserved by ōtuvārs (reciters) in Tirunelveli and Tirukkutralam. The latter manuscript, examined by Mr. Mudaliar, contains 3011 quatrains. Personal correspondence, Dec. 5, 1978.

[3]Dandapani Desikar, "The Tenth Tirumurai," Tevat Tamil, N. Sanjeeri, ed. (Madras: University of Madras, 1975), p. 194.

these stanzas are added to those found in published editions, the total number exceeds 3100.

To account for the discrepancy between this figure and the traditional claim of 3000 mantras, several explanations have been proposed. Some commentators maintain that the number 3000 should be understood as a poetic approximation rather than as an exact figure. Others, including A. Visvanatha Pillai (of Jaffna), would solve the issue differently. They suggest totalling the numbers listed in verse 3046. When this is done (3000 + 300 + 30 + 3), the resultant 3,333 is then some 200 more than the 3,100+ known and ascribed verses. The loss of 200 is, in turn, attributed to natural causes such as worms and ants!

While neither of these solutions challenges the authenticity of many of the mantras with which we are concerned in this thesis, the more widespread literal readings of verse 3046 do. Two well-known twentieth century supporters of the latter are V. V. Ramana Sastri and P. Ramanatha Pillai. Because their attempts to recover the supposed original 3000 raise certain questions about the status and distribution of mythic references which will be discussed in succeeding chapters, a brief consideration of the arguments of each seems appropriate at this point.

According to R. Sastri, 45 of the 112 quatrains of the pāyiram (preface) are to be understood as insertions

made by disciples. The remaining 67 are taken to be authentic verses which have been displaced from the main body of the text. A suggestion is then made as to how the latter should be reintegrated into the first two chapters.[1]

Whereas R. Sastri only speculated about such a planned redistribution, P. R. Pillai actually carried out his own Bultmann-like reconstruction of the supposed original. Published in 1942,[2] Ramanatha Pillai's edition containing exactly 3000 verses, rearranges numerous individual mantras solely on the basis of similarity of theme without regard for the original context.[3] Seven verses (105,106, 107, 108, 1829 and 3046) are isolated out as valuable interpolations and are prefixed to the pāyiram as a special preface (cirappu pāyiram). Finally, over 50 stanzas have been deleted as repetitions; this despite the fact that many are only similar and not verbatim.[4] In this way, the

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[1]Sastri presents this position in his introduction to M. V. Visvanatha Pillai's Tamil edition of the Tirumantiram, p. 23,24.

[2]Tirumantiram (Tirunelveli: The South India Śaiva Siddhānta Works Publishing Society, Vol. I, II; reprint ed. 1957).

[3]For example, totally disregarding the distinction between verse 63 where Śiva is portrayed as the discloser of the Vedas and verse 103 where Śiva is described more mystically as the meaning of that which is disclosed, R. Ramanatha Pillai wrenches verse 103 from its context and juxtaposes it beside the former. His only justification for doing so is the fact that both discuss Śiva's relationship to the Vedas. While this is a logical arrangement, it is not Mūlar's.

[4]Verses 70 and 74 are similar but not identical yet

commentator was able to reduce the number of quatrains without claiming an excessive number of interpolations.

It should be noted that although both of these commentators were ostensibly concerned with identifying the 3000 stanzas referred to in verse 3046, it is clear that ideological considerations influenced their assessments. R. Pillai, for example, demonstrates a strong pro-Tamil bias by deleting verses 75, 76 and 86 which celebrate the greatness of Tamil and Sanskrit. The only explanation given is that it is not acceptable to regard the Arya (Sanskrit) language as the most excellent for praising the Lord with devotion.[1]

Sastri, meanwhile, strives to play down the Tamil character of Mūlar's work. Finding it significant that the Bhakti Vilāsam of Upamanyu calls the treatise the Mantra Mālika without making any mention of its Tamil nature, Sastri maintains this "shows that the original of the Tirumantiram is in Sanskrit."[2] Stanzas within the

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the latter is simply deleted without further justification.

[1]Introductory remarks in his edition of the Tirumantiram, p. 45.

[2]Introductory remarks in M. V. Visvanatha Pillai's edition of the Tirumantiram, p. 15. Dandipani Desikar, a contemporary commentator has stated that in searching over 30 years he has not found any such Sanskrit text as the Mantra Mālika of which the Tirumantiram is supposed to be a translation. Teyvat Tamil, N. Sanjeeri, ed. (Madras: University of Madras, 1975), p. 213.

Tirumantiram such as 75, 76, 86 and 91 which clearly exalt the Tamil are conveniently labelled interpolations, and then with a dubious 'tour de force' are reinterpreted to support his own position. For example, verse 91 reads:

> The One who created me assigned me this task
> In Tamil His glory to expound well.
> (TM 91 cd)

The point of this autobiographical verse is obvious when taken at face value, yet Sastri categorizes it as an insertion and then interprets it as a reference to a time when the Sanskrit Mantra Mālika was translated into Tamil. In can be seen, therefore, that each of these two commentators, for his own reasons, denies the Tirumantiram's attempt to reconcile these two great traditions.

Besides, the evident lack of objectivity shown by both men, there are two other grounds for arguing against the positions they have formulated. The first argument pertains to R. Sastri's suggestion to relocate section one of the pāyiram dealing with paracivam parapavam (the greatness of Śiva). In existing editions, the opening line[1] of this section reads:

> oṉṟavan tāṉē iraṇṭavaṉ iṉṉaruḷ
> The One is He, the second is His grace.

This agrees with a reference to the initial verse recorded in the Periya Purāṇa:

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[1]Excluding the two invocatory verses.

> Seated under an Aśoka tree, Mūlar composed the Tirumantiram mālai...which begins with the word 'onravan' (one)
> (P. P. 3589)

Further, Vajravelu Mudaliar attests that the palm leaf manuscript preserved at Tirukkutralam begins in like manner with the phrase 'onravan tānē.' If the initial section of the pāyiram were relocated in section three of the first tantra, as Sastri has proposed, then this description would no longer be valid. It would seem that to challenge both available manuscripts and Cēkkilār's account, Sastri's argument would have to be more substantial.

There is yet another reason for objecting to the textual analysis provided by R. Pillai and R. Sastri. Both the former's attempt to undertake a large-scale redistribution of isolated mantras and the latter's attempt at a wholesale bracketing of a significant portion of the preface rest on the questionable assumption that the mantras can be regarded as independent units rather than as interdependent members of a significant sequence of stanzas. Although Zvelebil alluded to such a possibility when he wrote that the various quatrains "may yet be considered as self-contained, solitary stanzas,"[1] a careful analysis of the pāyiram and early tantras reveals the presence of distinct

[1]Kamil Kieth Zvelebil, Tamil Literature (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1974), p. 55.

groupings bound together by a unique and subtle logic which will be described later.

Here, however, it is necessary to comment on the fact that different Tamil editions of the Tirumantiram disagree on the numerical sequence of verses found in the pāyiram and to anticipate objections that such variations support the notion of disjunctive, free-floating stanzas or, at least will hinder any attempt to demonstrate the existence of a necessary logical ordering. By way of response, Chart #1 on the following page shows that the differences are not crucial and that on the contrary, they actually lend credence to my own position regarding the presence of mantric clusters. For purposes of comparison, the sequence given in the first printed edition has been adopted as the norm.

The first thing this chart makes apparent is that the differences in ordering are not random or haphazard, but fall into two distinct patterns. Secondly, it reveals that each of the nine sections of the preface have been preserved intact, and that when shifts do occur, they involve not individual stanzas but a definite grouping of mantras. Thus Mūlar's remarks on 'Humility' (I) constitute a unit regardless of whether they occupy the 9th position as in V. Pillai's edition or the 2nd position as in Varadarajan's. Similarly his description of the Āgamas contains 10 stanzas regardless of the position this cluster occupies in the

various editions.

Comparative Chart

EDITIONS:	M.V.Visvanatha Pillai	A.Visvanatha Pillai	Varadarajan	Natarajan	R.Aiyer
Introductory verses:	1 2	1 2	2 1	2 1	1 2
1. On Siva:	I. 3-50	I	I	I	I
2. Trimurtis:	II. 51-60	II	IX	IX	IX
3. On Vedas:	III. 61-66	III	II	II	II
4. On Agamas:	IV. 67-76	IX	III	III	III
5. On Gurus:	V. 77-82	V	IV	IV	IV
6. On Mular:	VI. 83-104	VI	V	V	V
7. Guru Rank	VII. 105,106	VII	VIII	VIII	VIII
8. Tiruman-tiram:	VIII. 107,108	VIII	VII	VII	VII
9. Humility:	IX. 109-112	IX	VI	VI	VI

Ordering of verses in the pāyiram as they appear in various editions of the Tirumantiram.

The extent of the structuring will become evident as we examine how the logic of mythic references reveals the underlying unity of thought and motivation concealed in the text as a whole. This in turn will provide a more objective basis for judging interpolations than has been proposed by either Ramana Sastri or Ramanatha Pillai. It will also supplement the list of factors traditionally considered as

criteria for judging interpolations; factors which Vajravelu Mudaliyar enumerates as follows:[1]

1. The identification of odd expressions not in conformity with the main trend of the author's thinking.
2. Indications of deviation from the rules of prosody which the author is supposed to have followed, namely the verse form of quatrains, with each line in the kali-viruttam metre.[2] (Here it may be noted that some scholars hold that this is a simple metre which can be easily imitated.)
3. The presence of any anachronisms, although these are difficult to gauge due to the absence of any definitive dating of the work.

In the case of verses containing mythic material which is common, easily metred and quite traditional in content, the above criteria are not particularly relevant. Here the analysis of Mūlar's 'mytho-logic' will prove valuable for establishing the text as well as for understanding its socio-religious significance. To develop this point we move next to a consideration of those myths which most clearly elucidate the underlying vision of the Tirumantiram in relation to the practical spiritual needs of the diverse groups for whom it was intended.

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[1] Personal correspondence, Dec. 5, 1978.

[2] 'Kali' indicates that each line contains four feet; 'viruttam' follows the general rule that if a foot in one line ends in 'ma,' 'vilam,' 'kay' or 'kani,' then the corresponding feet in the other lines must end in the same.

IV. SAIVA SECTS AND THE MYTHIC VISION LINKING THEM

In the previous chapter we argued that the Tirumantiram is a unique or sui generis composition and that its author was not simply handing on a set of standardized teachings which he had received but was, instead, creatively reinterpreting the Āgamic tradition for his own time in light of the needs of the Tamil-speaking Saivas of the South. Here we will look more closely (a) at the diverse kinds of groups for whom the Garland of Mantras had been prepared, and (b) at the central mythic image which guided Mūlar's attempt to foster an increased sense of unity among them.

TYPES OF SAIVA DEVOTEES

In the opening verses of the pivotal fifth tantra, Tirumūlar identifies four distinct types of Saivas:[1] the Suddha (pure) Saivas,[2] the Asuddha (imperfect) Saivas,[3] the Sanmārga Saivas[4] (Saivas of the good path) and the Kadum

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[1] TM 1419.

[2] Sec. 1, vss. 1420-1422.

[3] In his commentary, A. Visvanatha Pillai expands the term 'asuddha' to read 'ati suddha' which he translates as 'very pure' but in light of the descriptions given in section 27, verses 1423, 1424, and 1435 it would seem more accurate to take 'asuddha' as referring to that which is imperfect or yet to be purified.

[4] Sec. 3, vss. 1427-1429.

Śuddha (extremely pure) Śaivas.[1] These four designate kinds of Śaivas rather than specific groups. A general description of each is provided in the first four consecutive sections entitled "Śuddha Śaivas," "Aśuddha Śaivas," and so on. The Śuddha Śaivas are those who are able to perceive what is sat (eternal), asat (non-eternal) and satasat (both eternal and non-eternal).[2] Having gone beyond the various manifestations of illusion (māyā), they are able to distinguish cit (knowledge) from acit (ignorance).[3] What is neyam[4] (Skt. object; Tml. dear, precious) for these Śaivas is the eternal Ultimate, and they are learned not only in the Vedic Śāstras but in the Āgamic practices of caryā (religious observance), kriyā (ritual), and yoga by which

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[1]Sec. 4, vss. 1438-1442.

[2]Sutra 7 of Meykaṇṭar's Civa Ñāṇa Pōṭam (ci. 13th cent.) indicates a philosophical-theological correspondence between sat and pati (lord), asat and pāśam (matter), satasat and aṇma, the equivalent of pāsu (soul).

[3]TM 1420 mentions two kinds of māyā, śuddha and aśuddha. The former refers to a condition wherein the soul is bound by a single impurity namely, āṇava māla or primordial ignorance; the latter to a condition wherein the soul is bound by a triple impurity namely, āṇava, karma and māyā.

[4]TM 1420. The play on word 'neyam' brings out the difference between the Vedas and the Āgamas. What the Vedas (Vedānta) announce in general terms to be their object or goal, the Āgamic tradition further specifies by calling attention to the 'dearness' of the object or to the 'dear One' who is the 'Object.' Similarly, the expression 'nittam param' or Eternal Ultimate is more transpersonal than the designations 'aṇṇal' (ruler), āti piraṉ (primal Lord), and Śivam (the Godhead regarded as personal) which are commonly employed elsewhere throughout the text.

they attain jñāna or the realisation of the highest Tat* (i.e., That) proclaimed in the Upanisads:[1]

> They duly learned what ought to be learned,
> practiced the true yoga (mey yōkam) described therein, and
> gradually attained ñānam (wisdom) by dwelling on the primordial state (colpatam)[2] and becoming free of impurity.
> They, indeed, have the experience of seeing the highest "That" (tarparam).
> (TM 1421)

Because their goal is union with the Ultimate, their belief is held to be an expression of pure Vedānta. For Mūlar, this type of Vedānta is comparable to Siddhānta (vētāntam cuttam vilaṅkiya cittānta)[4] and, thus, its adherents deserve to be known as Śaiva Siddhāntins.[5]

Given the strong Vedic overtones of this description, it seems clear that Mūlar is referring to the theistic adherents of the Vedāntic tradition. Included in this classification would be those Smārta Brahmins who were prepared to accommodate themselves to the worship of popular deities. Their theology, which is reflected in the early

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*Tat = Tat uvam asi - 'That thou art' - an expression of union with the Ultimate.

[1]TM 1421.

[2]Commentators explain that 'colpatam' is to be read as 'tol patam' connoting 'tvam patam' or the state of self-knowledge leading to knowledge of the 'That' (Brahman).

[3]TM 1422.

[4]TM 1422.

[5]TM 1421.

non-sectarian Purāṇas, such as the Agni and Mārkaṇḍeya Purāṇas, enabled them to honor Brahman under the name of various deities, in particular as Gaṇeśa, Dūrga, Sūrya, Viṣṇu and Śiva. Like the great ācārya, Śaṅkara, many of these Smārtas associated themselves with Śaivism. What apparently leads Mūlar to acknowledge them as Śuddha Śaivas was not their theism per se but rather their practical determination to know the self, free themselves from their bonds and seek an immediate experience of the ultimate without being encumbered or sidetracked by overemphasis on the secondary external manifestations of religion.

> Pure Vedānta is illustrious (Śaiva) Siddhānta
> Those who realize the transcending Word are
> persons of unwavering vision.
> They free themselves of tattvas and worldly
> knowledge by controlling the senses.
> They become one with their 'object' of
> knowledge (i.e., Śivam).[1]

In general, the Vedāntins were distinguished by their single-mindedness.

By contrast, the second group called Aśuddha Śaivas were mainly associated with their outward insignia. They are described as wearing ashes, rudrākṣa beads and assorted chains.[2] Though they worship the Holy Feet of Śiva,[3] submit

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[1] vētāntam cuttam viḷaṅkiya cittānta
nātāntam kaṇṭōr naṭukkarra katciyar
pūtānta pōtānta mākap puṇañceyya
nātānta pūraṇar ñāṉanē yattarē (TM 1422).

[2] TM 1423, 1424.

[3] TM 1423.

to purification rites and receive instruction (upadesa),[1] their studies were all concerned primarily with the external practices of Śaivism, that is, they were attentive to details connected with caryā and kriyā.[2] Consequently their upāya or means of realisation is labelled 'ordinary' for it tends to be devoid of the knowledge of Vedānta.[3]

Allowing for the fact that Tirumūlar is deliberately writing in general terms in order to indicate that these characteristics cut across group boundaries and apply to individuals following various paths, it is nevertheless helpful, for the sake of clarity, to indicate certain Śaiva groups which would be most likely to be included in this broad classification. Those which stand out would be the extreme sects of the Pāśupatas such as the Kāpālikas[4] and Kālāmukhas whose eccentricities were targeted for ridicule in the satirical Sanskrit play of Mahendravarman.[5] At the same time Mūlar's description would be applicable to the

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[1]TM 1424.

[2]TM 1423.

[3]TM 1435.

[4]According to M. Rajamanickam, the Kāpālikas were noted for being excessively attentive to externals. "Their doctrine was that those who receive Dikṣa according to the Śāstras and beg, receive and eat food in a human skull with a green flag in the hand will become Muktas (and) will become equal to Śiva." The Development of Śaivism in South India (A.D. 300-1300), Dharmapuram, 1964, p. 70.

[5]Mattavilāsa Prahasana, 7th c. A.D. See above pp. 103, 104.

gamut of individuals whose devotion continued to manifest itself primarily in terms of outward observances and ritual practices without experiencing a corresponding growth in inner awareness. It can be surmised that many belonging to this classification would have participated in the worship of images, made pilgrimages to holy shrines and temples and been generally caught up in varying degrees of religious emotionalism.

In identifying the Asuddha Śaivas with their external religious activities, Mūlar was not saying that their paths were lacking in philosophical or doctrinal formulations but only that, in practice, these groups tended to become preoccupied with facets of the lesser sādhanas.[1] C. V. Narayana Ayyar sensed this when he suggested that Mūlar intends to say that the Aśuddha Śaivas will become more perfect when "they attach greater importance to jñāna than to externals."[2] Collectively, members of the second group are designated 'ordinary' Śaiva bhaktas[3] but they should not be confused with the more advanced bhaktas, like the Nāyaṉārs whose commitment was accompanied by a deepening of knowledge

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[1]The descriptions provided in the fifth tantra indidate that Mūlar was not classifying Śaivas according to their philosophical or doctrinal differences but rather in terms of the kind of sādhanas they practiced. In other words, he distinguished them more in relation to their orthopraxis than their orthodoxy.

[2]Origin and Early History, p. 249.

[3]TM 1435.

(jñāna) and love (Tml. anpu). In the Tirumantiram the advanced bhaktas are referred to as jñānis.[1]

The difference between the two types of bhaktas becomes evident when we consider Mūlar's complimentary description of the Mārga Śaivas. Unlike their unenlightened counterparts (i.e., the Aśuddha Śaivas), the learned bhaktas who follow the good path (i.e., the Āgamic path) are individuals who make use of holy ash and golden rudraksa beads, etc., as sādhanas or means to realisation without losing sight of the main sādhana, namely 'the knowledge which does not lead astray.'[2] They are distinguished by their involvement in the fourfold Āgamic disciplines which lead the devotee from observances (caryā) and ritual (kriyā) through yoga to realisation of a higher knowledge (jñāna) which, in turn, enlightens and enhances the subsequent practice of caryā and kriyā. If the Vedāntins (Śuddha Śaivas) are special because they recognize the transcendent truth of Siddhānta and Vedānta to be one,[3] the Mārga Śaivas are extolled because they show how the truth of the latter is to be rendered practical by following the fourfold sādhanas as a means to increase their receptivity to divine grace (arul).[4] Like the former, the followers of the Āgamic path

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[1] TM 1428.
[2] TM 1427.
[3] TM 1429.
[4] TM 1427.

(mārga) meditate on the tripādarthas of pati (Lord), paśu (soul) and pāśam (bonds of matter), and on Sadāśiva, bondage and liberation; unlike the former their specific goal is not to realize "aham brahmāsmi"[1] but Śivoham,"[2] because, for them, the Absolute is personal and rightfully to be called Śiva. According to verse 1428 these are the individuals who become true jñānis because in them arises the knowledge of Siddhānta. For them is held out the goal of becoming truly liberated beings (jīvan muktas) and excellent Śaiva bhaktas.[3]

In Tirumūlar's time, those who followed the fourfold Āgamic path were called Mahēśvaras[4] and verses 1857 to 1867 in the 7th tantra describe the nature of Mahēśvara pūjā or the worship of Mahēśvaras. But this was basically a generic term and could be applied to members of the Pāśupata and Kāpālika sects as well. Another more precise designation for the Mārga Śaivas would be to refer to them as Ādi Śaivas. Most, but not all, would be non-Brahmins and their outlook

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[1] I am Brahman.

[2] I am Śiva.

[3] TM 1428.

[4] M. Rajamanickam, Development of Śaivism, p. 71. Also Vācaspati Miśra, the 9th century commentator of Śaṅkara's Śārivaka Bhāṣya, writes that the Mahēśvaras consist of Śaivas, Pāśupatas, Karunika Siddhāntins and Kāpālikas. S. Dasgupta, History of Indian Philosophy, Vol. V, p. 1.

would be basically neo-Brahmanical in the sense that while they nomincally pledged allegiance to the authority of the Vedas, they, nevertheless, remained critical of caste privileges, and were more inclined to support the teachings of the Sanskrit Agamas as well as to involve themselves in the temple-oriented worship of the liṅgam and other visible images.[1]

The fourth group identified by Tirumūlar are the Kadum Śuddha Śaivas. They are described as people who,

> Without displaying any of the external forms
> of characteristics (of Śaivas),
> Go straight to the changing one (i.e., Śiva)
> who transcends all forms and
> Who, (in so doing), destroy their bonds of
> desire and
> Become emptied of the pain-giving realities
> of pāśam and pāśutva.
> (TM 1428)

The spontaneous quality of their devotion is emphasized by employing the Tamil folk term cadum, meaning ' to hop or to jump onto.' "The (Kadum) Śuddha Śaivas are those who 'leap onto' the knowledge of the Lord (cadum civa potakar)."[2] Without going through the usual stages[3] spoken of by Śuddha Śaivas they are, nevertheless, to be regarded as such because they have learned the inner truth of the teaching of the liberated (muktas); that is, (they have learned the truth

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[1] Smārta Brahmins also adopted image worship but without neglecting the aniconic fire rituals of the Vedic tradition.

[2] TM 1438.

[3] This appears to be a reference to the formal methods of learning whether Vedic or Āgamic.

of) the seed of liberation (mukti).[1] As Mūlar writes, "Souls such as these who reach the Lord, thus become pure Śivam (and) they are, indeed, (to be regarded) Śuddha Śaivas."[2] The reason why these unorthodox devotees are commended so highly, can be inferred from several verses immediately following the one just cited. They were exemplary because they were able to overcome the error of thinking of their relationship with Śiva in terms of "myself and himself." In their own way they were able to experience the truth of the phrase 'tat tvam asi' and to realize that when "saying him" (tān enru) they were, at the same time, "saying I" (nānenru).[3] In other words, they had discovered that in saying "him," their "I" was implied.

C. V. Narayana Ayyar notes that this highly complimentary description of the extremely pure followers of Śiva "applies to a class of people about whom there is no mention in later Śaiva Śiddhānta literature,"[4] an omission which he attributes to the fact that later writers were concerned only with followers of the Sanmārga path. The description of these devotees does apply,however, to some of the saints (Nāyaṉārs) honored in the hagiographic accounts

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[1] TM 1440.

[2] TM 1440.

[3] TM 1441.

[4] Origin and Early History, p. 251.

of the Periya Purāṇa and, by extension, to others like them whose names would never be recorded by the tradition. Perhaps the most outstanding of those listed by Cēkkiḻār was Kaṇṇappa, a young hunter who, being ignorant of all formal Āgamic rubrics, improvises his own spontaneous pūjā. He begins by anointing the Siva liṅgam with water carried in his mouth instead of vessels. Then, apparently ignorant of the requirement that Āgamic offerings were to be strictly vegetarian and blossoms were to be freshly strung, Kaṇṇappa offers roasted pork which he has pretasted and the flowers he has worn in his hair. In his extreme devotion he was even prepared to blind himself for the Lord. Both Appar and Campantar sing of Kaṇṇappa in their hymns. It has been suggested by Narayana Ayyar[1] that Campantar himself would be another who met the criteria laid down by Mūlar, if the story be true that this saint became a devotee of Śiva at the tender age of three or four. Like Kaṇṇappa, his would be a kind of spontaneous or untutored bhakti. Individuals manifesting such signs of devotion were not to be faulted for their lack of formal religious training because they had had access to the most effective means, the grace of God Himself.

Other ways of classifying Śaivas were proposed in

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[1] Ibid. p.251.

the course of the early medieval period in the South[1] but the rationale underlying the Tirumantiram's succinct typological profiles emerges as being particularly compelling. According to the descriptions provided in the fifth tantra, two traits were being observed: (1) the amount of emphasis a group or individual placed on attaining knowledge of Śiva and (2) the effectiveness of the means they employed to achieve that end. What was distinctive about this approach was that it regarded obvious differences among Śaivas as matters to be evaluated in terms of an ultimate goal on which there was general agreement. The goal was to be united with the beloved Object of knowledge (ñāna nēyattar). The nature of this liberating event is described in mystical terms as an experience of oneness that transcends the dualism of thinking of the Lord as separate from oneself:

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[1] In the penultimate verse of his Tiruttoṇṭar Tokai, Cuntarar lists seven classifications of Saints: those who worship the liṅga three times daily, those who worship at holy places, those who wear sacred ash, those who worship Śaiva aṭiyars (saints), yogīs, poets and those who love God beyond Tamil land. Each refers to the way the individual worships the Lord but does not suggest any ranking of the activities. See M. A. Dorai Rangaswamy, The Religion and Philosophy of Tēvāram, Vol. III, p. 106. Anandagiri, a contemporary of Śaṅkara supplies a long list of Śiva devotees, distinguishing them in terms of their outward marks. S. Dasgupta, A History of Indian Philosophy, Vol. V., p. 2. Vācaspati (9th C.) in his commentary on Śaṅkara's Bhāṣya II.2.37 speaks of four types: (Āgama) Śaivas, Pāśupatas, Karuṇika-siddhāntins and Kāpālikas; Ramanuja (12th C.), commenting on Brahmā Sūtra II.2.36 lists Kāpālas, Kālāmukhas, Pāśupatas and Śaivas.

As I remain seeking (in terms of) "I" and "He"
He provides (me) with the true meaning of the
word "Tat"
Which cannot be distinguished as "I" and "He"
(He shows me that) saying "He" implies "I"
Therefore, I can no longer distinguish "He,"
"I"[1]

This oneness, in which the soul is neither identified with nor different from the Lord, is important because it moves the mind beyond the kind of divisive consciousness which fosters religious intolerance.

Not being one (identical with) or two
(different from)
or neither, but standing united
(literally, 'one-d'),
being free of religious refutations, and
becoming one with Śivam, the dear object,
This is (the goal of) the Siddhānta siddhi.[2]

Tolerance is linked to spiritual maturity. It is the latter who are able to recognize diverse religious paths as expressions of the graciousness of the Creator.

1

nāṉeṉṟum tāṉeṉṟum nāṭiṉāṉ cāravē
tāṉeṉṟu nāṉeṉ ṟiṇṭilāt taṟpatam
tāṉeṉṟu nāṉeṉṟa tattuva nalkalāl
tāṉeṉṟu nāṉeṉṟun cāṟṟakil lēṉē
TM 1441

2

oṉṟum iraṇṭum ilatum āy oṉṟāka
niṉṟu camaya nirākāram nīṅkiyē
niṉṟu parāparai nēyattaip patattal
ceṉṟu civam ātal cittānta cittiyē
TM 1437

If one were to have an idea of the greatness of
the omniscient One,
Who creates both the town and the world as a
whole,
(Of the greatness) that is comparable only to
that of Mt. Meru,
It is (to be seen) in the four kinds of Śaivism
found in the world that originated from the
Ruler of the three worlds.[1]

TYPES OF RELIGIOUS CREEDS

To understand why the author of the Tirumantiram was so preoccupied with unifying the various segments of the southern Śaiva community, it is necessary to see how his fourfold classification helped to clarify the position of Śaivas in relation to the more or less heterodox sects that were still active in the South and commanding the allegiance of certain segments of the population. The context can be established by briefly recalling the religious conflicts which emerged at the onset of the bhakti period. At that time there were two distinct camps locked in a major religious struggle. One was composed of those who accepted the orthodox traditions of the Brahmins and the other composed of those who followed the heterodox traditions of the śramaṇas (i.e., the Jains and Buddhists). By the middle of

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[1] ūrum ulakamum okkap paṭaikkiṉṟa
pēraṟi vāḻaṉ perumai kuṟittiṭiṉ
meruvum mūvula kāḻi yilaṅkeḻun
tāraṇi nālvakaic caivamu māmē
(TM 1419)

the 7th century, the sometimes bitter contest between these two factions had been for the most part, decided in favor of those who acknowledged the authority of the Vedas. As a result of this victory,[1] for which the Tēvāram Saints were largely responsible, the Hindu population not only came to distinguish between the theistic and non-theistic sects but subsequently gained a heightened awareness of their own internal religious differences. For it seems that once they were relieved of a significant external threat, the Śaivas, Vaiṣṇavas and Smārtas then began to vie with one another for the allegiance of the people and for the patronage of the kings. Mūlar alludes to these sectarian tensions when he chastises those of his audience who may be inclined to engage in useless confrontations about whether God is one or many[2] or whether this or that is the true religion (camayaṅkaḷ).[3] That dissensions were causing rifts among the Śaivas themselves can be inferred from verse 1558 which explains that the six (Śaiva) creeds "are like six roads leading to one and the same city and those who discriminate between them for the purpose of condemning one or the other are no better than dogs barking at a hill."[4]

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[1] Discussed in detail in Chapter II.

[2] TM 52.

[3] TM 1545.

[4]
onṟatu pērūr vaḻiyā ṟataṟkuḷa
enṟatu pōl irumuc camayamum

In assessing the religious situation of his time, Mūlar apparently decided that the main task at hand was not to proceed against other groups but to develop a greater sense of solidarity among the loose federation of Śaiva sects. Perhaps he felt a united home front was the best defense. In this, he differed noticeably from the Tēvāram saints who concerned themselves with directly opposing other creeds and those who followed them.[1] Whereas Appar and Campantar had made derogatory remarks about the Jains (śramanas) and Buddhists (theras) in almost every one of their numerous decades, Mūlar allots only three sections[2] and fewer than fifty verses for making explicit comments on religious creeds (camayaṅkaḷ) other than Śaiva Siddhānta and even in these the tone can hardly be described as polemical or defensive. There is no straight forward

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naṉṟitu tītitu eṉṟurai yālarkaḷ
kuṉṟu kuraittelu nāyaiyot tārkalē
(TM 1558)

[1]Maṇikkavācakar, who is generally recognized as the latest of the four great Śaiva saints (the other being Appar, Campantar and Cuntarar), is said to have vehemently debated with Buddhist ascetics in Citamparam. It is said, however, that these monks came from Ceylon and were not resident there. Even so, those who hold this view cite Canto VI of the Vātavūrar Purāṇam in which the arguments of the great debate are recorded. But G. U. Pope in his translation of the Tiruvācakam (Oxford: Clarendon, 1960), pp.2,3, notes that this Purāṇa is only a modern legendary poem based on an 18th c. work known as the Vilaiyatal Purāṇam. The supposed friction between Manikkavācakar and the Buddhists cannot be substantiated by the saint's own collection of hymns which are included in Book VIII of the Tirumurai.

[2]Chapter 5, Sections 18, 19, 20.

condemnation of any particular creed and no singling out of any specific doctrines, practices or groups. Instead, what one finds are certain categorical objections levelled against a collection of religious creeds identified only as the "āru camayaṅkaḷ" (the six creeds).

As might be expected, commentators do not agree on the identity of these creeds and, given the absence of detailed descriptions in the Tirumantiram, they can only speculate. N. V. Visvanatha Pillai suggests that the six included the Bhairavas (a Śaiva sect), Jains, Pāñcarātrins (a Vaiṣṇava sect), Bhaṭṭācāryas (Pūrva Mīmāṁsā sect), Lokāyatas (an atheistic school of Materialism) and the Śūniyavādas (Nihilistic school) but he cites no authority for this listing.[1] Nor does this view take into account verse 1537 which clearly states that the number six stands for religious systems in general and ought to be taken idiomatically:

> Even if one were to say there are 100's of religious
> They can be gathered under these six (headings).[2]

From my reading of the text, C.V. Narayana Ayyar proffers a less arbitrary and more insightful interpretation

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[1] The Tirumantiram, preface.

[2] nuṟu camayam uḷavam nuvaluṅkāl
āṟu camayam avvāṟuṭpaṭuvaṉa
(TM 1537 a,b)

when he argues that the six designate traditional systems of thought deriving from both the Vedas and Śivāgamas. Citing verse 1449 which speaks of the six Vedāntas and the six Siddhāntas, Narayana maintains that Mūlar is "referring to one and the same set of six"[1] throughout the fifth tantra. As he sees it, the latter's aim is not to differentiate individual creeds but to distinguish between two basic approaches to religion, that which is concerned with external religion (puraccamayam) and that which is concerned with internal religion (utcamayam). The former, described in section 18, is regarded inadequate for several reasons. First, because it directs attention outward thereby hindering those who follow it from perceiving the One who dwells within the body;[2] secondly, because the six creeds only evoke a desire to attain heavenly existence despite their claim to go beyond and seek the Lord;[3] and lastly, they are inadequate because they rely on self-exertion rather than on the grace of Śiva.[4] As for internal religion (utcamayam) which is discussed in section 20, it is to be preferred because it seeks to discover the formless One who is immanent.[5] It is

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[1] Origin and Early History, pp. 263, 264.

[2] TM 1530.

[3] TM 1535. They seek the temporary satisfaction of the realm of the devas rather than the permanent moksa of union with Śiva.

[4] TM 1534.

[5] A discussion of the formless immanent Lord is given in the intervening section 19.

not the externals of religion that liberate but the realization of the inner truth which, according to the text, can be nothing other than experiential knowledge of Śiva. On the other hand, the externals are not simply to be dismissed for it was Mūlar's yogic-inspired conviction that whenever anyone discovers the innermost core of the six basic creeds (camayaṅkal), they, in fact, discover Śiva.

The goal of realizing Śiva was not without its social relevance. The self-discipline envisaged in the Tirumantiram called upon devotees to become like their Lord who consistently remains accessible to all who seek Him. Identifying with the Lord in this manner would require the development of virtues like forbearance and magnanimity, the same kind of qualities that would be needed to creatively counter the climate of tension as well as the competitive mind set engendered by religious rivalries. If Mūlar's ideal were to be achieved, Śaiva solidarity would be rooted in the profound cohesive experience of becoming one with Śiva. The absence of such an encounter was seen as a handicap to be overcome because the individual would lack the impetus needed to overcome negative conditioning and move toward a more compassionate understanding of religious differences.

Tirumūlar knew this from his own personal experience for according to his own account, he had not always been

interested in working out the question of religious pluralism. For much of his life, he seems to have been caught up in yogic meditations, recitations, ascetic exercises and the general pursuit of moksa. One day, however, as he was intoning the name of Śiva, the idea of composing an Āgama in Tamil flashes across his mind.[1] When this inspiration comes, he is drawn to the sabhā (dance hall) at Tillai (Citamparam). There, upon witnessing Śiva's cosmic dance, he quickly enters into a deep meditation on the Lord's grace which is made manifest in the Lady (i.e., Śakti).[2] It then dawns on him that as a yogī he had pursued his exercises without ever giving serious consideration to the meaning and significance of Sadāśiva or to the place of the Tamil and Vedic traditions in relation to Āgamic Śaivism:

> Until now I remained without being attentive to 'Sadāśiva tattva' (the truth of Sadāśiva), the threefold Tamil (tradition) and (the tradition) of the Vedas.[3]

He continues, "When the cloud overhanging my head disappeared, indifference to these things was gone and immediately we experienced."[4] Experienced what? I would

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[1] TM 73.

[2] TM 75.

[3] catācivam tattuvam muttamiḻ vētam
mitācaṇi yātirum tēṉiṉṟa kālam.
(TM 76 a,b)

[4] itācaṇi yātirun tēṉmaṇa nīṅki
utācaṇi yātuṭanē uṇarn tōmāl.
(TM 76 c,d)

suggest that the author of the Tirumantiram is here describing how he had come to recognize a positive bond between the Āgamic doctrines of Sadāśiva and the tattvas, and the religious traditions of the Vedas and Tamil bhaktas. Whereas these teachings and cults had co-existed in Tamil land for some time, Mūlar seems to have been content to leave them simply juxtaposed both geographically and mentally. In other words, up to this point he had made no attempt to see how these three traditions (i.e., Āgamic, bhakti and Vedic) fit together in any complementary or systematic way. He was, as it were, content in his own yogī world pursuing his goal in his own detached way.

It was his mystic experience at Tillai (Citamparam) that disturbed his previously satisfying vision of the world and the co-existence of diverse religious groups in it. Now he felt compelled to integrate new elements in his synthesis as he struggled to understand what the mystic experience taught him, namely, how much Āgamic Śaivism in South India was indebted to both the Vedic and Tamil bhakti cults. For this task, Mūlar's pre-understanding was inadequate since the horizon projected by his previous training was not comprehensive enough to allow, much less encourage him, to see how these three religious streams were interrelated in any significant way. It was only after his mystical experience involving a recognition of the unity of all things in

Śiva that he was able to envision possible connections which he had yet to fully understand.

THE CENTRAL MYTHIC IMAGE AND RELATED MYTHS

At this juncture of his life, Tirumūlar acquired a new appreciation of the centrality of the Sadāśiva image in Āgamic Śaivism. Verse 1432 makes it clear that followers of the Āgamic tradition are to be singled out for praise because they ponder the meaning of Sadāśiva. To understand why the latter becomes a priority, it is important to see how this image and the myths associated with it helped Mūlar make sense of his own personal experience as well as to communicate the insights derived from it to others. At the time the Tirumantiram was written, the image of Sadāśiva was used to express the formless form of Śiva It was represented by a liṅgam with faces carved on its perimeter[1] and was generally thought of in relation to one major Purāṇic myth - that of the Liṅgōdbhava or manifestation of

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[1]The earliest representation of this form of Siva dates back to the 2nd century B.C. Śivaliṅga found in the Allahabad district. B. N. Sharma, Iconography of Sadāśiva, (New Delhi; Abhinav Publications, 1976). p. 1. Other representations found later show ten arms with weapons and two feet. Ibid. p. 2-17; also Kāmikāgama Paṭalam IV. It is to this more elaborate form that Tirumantiram verse 1730 refers:

kūṭiya pātam iraṇṭum paṭimicai
pāṭiya kaiyiraṇ ṭeṭṭum paranteḻun
tēṭu mukamaintu ceṅkaiyiṉ mūvaintu
nāṭuṁ̃ catāciva nalloḷi muttē

See (meditate on) Sadāśivam of pearl-like lustre, Possessed of five faces spreading around and upwards, fifteen handsome eyes, ten hands highly praised and Two feet touching the earth.

Śiva,[1] and one major Āgamic doctrine - that of the Pañcakṛtya or fivefold saving activities of Śiva.[2] Examining how they are developed in the Tirumantiram, it will be seen that together they function as complementary cornerstones for building the foundations of religious tolerance.

The Liṅgodbhava Myth

The Liṅgodbhava myth[3] recounts an episode which occurs at the creation of the world. Brahmā, the lord of creation is pictured standing on the navel of Viṣṇu, the preserver-deity, who was lying on the surface of an endless (ananta) all-pervading ocean above the heavens. Above this ocean there was a vacuum and in this vacuum Brahmā could find nothing but the very stalk of the lotus from which he had originated. Out of curiosity regarding its source, Brahmā enters the stem and proceeds downward. He descends with great speed for thousands of years but without ever reaching the bottom of the stalk. Viṣṇu observes Brahmā's plight and out of sympathy appears before him and proceeds to describe himself as the source of the entire universe with its 24 tattvas (principles) and indicates that Brahmā's tendency to think himself the creator is due to māyā (illusion) which Viṣṇu also claims to have produced. Upon hearing this claim, Brahmā bursts into anger and challenges Viṣṇu to a dual. As the two are engaged in fierce battle hurling missiles at one another, an all-pervading column fire appears in the midst

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[1] SP, Vidyēśvarasaṁhitā, chapters 5 ff.

[2] Mṛgendra Āgama chapters, ch. 3 to 5, especially 3.9.

[3] SP, Vidyēśvarasaṁhitā, chapters 6,7.

of the vacuum. Both deities are startled by this fiery manifestation which signifies the presence of Śiva. For a moment they stop fighting and make an attempt to find the beginning and end of this great column. Brahmā, taking the form of a gander flies upwards and Viṣṇu, assuming the form of a boar, moves downwards. Though both gods move with extreme speed they are unable to reach either end of the column. Realizing that the pillar (i.e., Śiva) is without end, the deities cease contending and concede that Śiva is the Lord of all, who is over them both.

This myth is alluded to a number of times throughout the Tirumantiram where it is used in several different contexts but its primary function is to awaken a sense of the presence of the Lord surging up within the body of the devotee.

> The Lord with the five faces, fifteen eyes,
> Ten hands and ten weapons...
> Entered my heart, filled it to the brim
> and remained.[1]

Like all mythic references incorporated into the Tirumantiram, this one is reworked in order to draw out its spiritual and social implications. In its new corporeal setting, the

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[1] añcu mukamuḷa aimmūṉṟu kaṇṇuḷa
añcino ṭañsu karatalan tānuḷa
añcuṭaṉ añcā yutamuḷa nampiyeṉ
neñcu pukuntu niṟaintuniṉ ṟāṉē
(TM 1736)

Liṅgōdbhava myth encourages the devotee to view the body as a blessing rather than a curse precisely because the latter provides the intimate milieu in which the saving encounter takes place:

> I had previously thought the body was a liability.
> Then I saw the great truth (contained) therein.
> I saw the great Lord dwelling in my body
> and making it his temple (kōyil)
> This body I now cherish and preserve.[1]

For those who accepted the Liṅgōdbhava myth as a valid and ideal expression of their own personal religious experience or of that for which they were willing to strive, the implications brought out in Mūlar's religious critique would be that much more compelling. They would recognize the validity of his attempt to challenge the notions (a) that salvation comes from attachment to external religious forms, (b) that formal religious paths can be substituted for pursuing the one true inward path, or (c) that skillful but haughty religious disputations about spiritual matters can bring the participants closer to a real experiential knowledge (mey ñāna) of the One Lord. Those who accept the Liṅgōdbhava myth as central and subsequently acknowledge the implications drawn out by Mūlar, inevitably find that the

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[1] uṭampiṉai muṉṉam iḻukkeṉ ṟiruntēṉ
uṭampiṉuk kuḷḷē yuṟu poruḷ kaṇṭēṉ
uṭampuḷe uttamaṉ kōyilkoṇ ṭāṉ eṉṟu
uṭampiṉai yāṉirun tōmpukiṉ ṟēṉē
(TM 725)

very basis of sectarian rivalries - pride, superficial comparisons and personal gain - has been substantially undercut. As a yogī who was very much aware of the social ramifications of religious practices and beliefs, Tirumūlar recognized how internal dissensions over secondary or less than ultimate issues were, in fact, undermining the raison d'etre for engaging in the spiritual quest which called upon the individual to move toward the One and oneness or 'comm-unity' which that implies. By thus exposing the adherent's imagination to the transforming power of myth, he could hope to move his hearers beyond the confines of their conventional thinking and allow them to mentally anticipate that unitive experience which they had yet to know first hand. In this, the Tirumantiram exemplifies R. Panikkar's observation that myth is a powerful instrument for expanding one's understanding precisely because it enables one to accept what is not fully understood.[1]

The Pañcakṛtya Myth

In the Purāṇas[2] and Āgamas,[3] the Pañcakṛtya doctrine, (which will be described shortly) is associated with the image of Sadāśiva. In the Tirumantiram, this doctrine is linked not only with Sadāśiva[4] but with the dynamic image of Śiva as the

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[1] Myth, Faith and Hermeneutics (New York: Paulist Press, 1979), p. 32.

[2] SP, Kailāsaṁhitā ch. 14,15.

[3] Kāmikāgama, Mṛgendrāgama, ch. 5

[4] TM Tantra 7, section 4.

Naṭarāj (i.e. Lord of the dance).[1] Insofar as the Pañcakṛtya became thus superimposed on such anthropomorphic and quasi-anthropomorphic images of Śiva, it will be regarded as having taken on a mythic character and, although it lacks a narrative component, the correlation of this doctrine with one or more visual representations will be understood in a broad sense as the Pañcakṛtya myth. Like the Liṅgodbhava myth, the latter is employed in the Tirumantiram to capture the imagination of members of the various Śaiva sects in order to broaden their frame of reference and, thereby, increase their capacity for a critical acceptance of religious difference.

The Pañcakṛtya myth appears to have been chosen for two reasons. First, because it underscores the dynamic character of the redemptive process and, secondly, because it shows the latter to be a positive manifestation of the Lord's graciousness. The graceful drama unfolds as Siva manifests himself in creation (Skt. sṛṣṭi; Tml. pataittal) with its evolution of the principles of existence (i.e., tattvas) necessary for the genesis of the world and for the advent of human life which is occasioned by the union of body (Tml. utal) and soul (Tml. uyir);[2] in conservation (Skt. sthiti; Tml. kāttal) by sustaining that which comes into existence by the grace of the Lord's prevading presence,[3] and in destruction (Skt. saṁhāra; Tml. alittal) by the involution of matter and

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[1] TM 2799

[2] TM verses 381-410 outline the basic principles of creation.

[3] TM 411-420.

fettered souls as they undergo the forces of decay, death and periodic dissolution in the ongoing process of returning to their Source.[1] The drama continues on the micro-cosmic plane as the above activities are complemented by Śiva's further revelation of himself in two additional operations namely, in the phenomena of obscuration (Skt. tirodhāna; Tml. maraittal) and the final descent of grace (Skt. anugraha; Tml. arulal). The former involves a veiling of God's presence which allows the soul to gradually awaken to its own true nature,[2] while the latter occasions the souls's liberating union in the Lord.[3]

According to this mythic interpretation of God's relationship to the world, liberation is not a single operation but a process in which all facets of reality are meant to cooperate. Creation provides the conditions necessary for placing the soul in a field of experience in keeping with its karmic accumulation. Conservation supplies the space and time needed to 'enjoy' the fruits of one's deeds (karma).

Obscuration complements this second phase of the redemption process by allowing the soul to become attached to what is impermanent (i.e., to material goods, wealth, body) until it learns, from pain and suffering, to see beyond the transient. Similarly, the micro-cosmic operation of arulal completes the cosmic activity of destruction for it is the final descent of grace that destroys the bonds which lead to death and to the involvement in the periodic dissolution of

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[1] TM 421-430.

[2] TM 431-440.

[3] TM 441-450. Campantar knows of these operations and refers to Śiva as arutalañcinar, the Lord of the five mercies, 143.3. See also Tiruvácakam I.41-43.

the world. In this grand scheme, the end or goal (i.e., union with Śiva) is not unrelated to the means or the process itself. Unlike the advaitic conception which maintains the fundamentally illusory character of the world and plurality of souls, the Śaiva understanding, as it is presented in the Tirumantiram, acknowledges both as being positive, real manifestations of God's grace. What the Pañcakṛtya myth stresses is that life itself is a religious journey because all events - being born, living, dying, veiling and unveiling - all have been appointed by the Gracious One himself.[1] Thus nothing is to be thought of as being insignificant with regard to the liberation of the soul but, rather, all things are held to be precious when viewed as potential instruments for revealing the Lord who pervades everything:

> The Lord, himself unceasingly abides everywhere -
> as body, as soul, as world
> as sea, cloud and as cloud-laden sky
> Indeed, the Lord abides as the great way (to the Goal)
> for those who reach his feet.[2]

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[1] pōkkum varavum puṉitaṉ aruḷpurintu
ākkamum cintaiya tākiṉṟa kālattu
mēkku mikaniṉṟa eṭṭut ṭicaiyodum
tākkum kalakkum tayāparaṉ tāṉē
The Holy One grants the grace of dying and being born (and all that occurs in between)
At the appointed time according to his thought, he commences evolution.
The eight directions and all space he pervades and animates. Indeed, He is the Gracious One.
(TM 393)

[2] uṭalāy uyirāy ulakam tākik
kaṭalāy kārmukil nīrpoḻi vāṉāy

The eschatological framework[1] presented in the Pañcakṛtya myth was important for Mūlar because it supported his basic contention that divergent practices were to be judged not in relation to one another but in terms of the telos which was common for all. That is, the relative merits of different paths were not to be determined a priori but only in terms of their actual effectiveness in leading individuals to a true knowledge of Śiva. For Mūlar, the Lord was to be known as the antar yamin or One who rules from within and this meant that those paths which best facilitate the inward journey may rightly be described as being more perfect than others. The yogic coloring of these insights is evident and it is here that we see how meditation prepared Mūlar for his role as mediator. For yogic meditation can be credited with both expanding his theological vision and inspiring his distinctive way of representing, to the Tamil population, mythic material drawn from traditional Sanskrit sources.

As regards the two major myths associated with the image of Sadāśiva, they supplied Mūlar with the popular images he needed to communicate his vision of that which

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iṭaiyāy ulappili eṅkum tāṉāki
aṭaiyār peruvaḷi aṉṉalniṉ rāṉē
(TM 393)

[1]Here the term eschatological refers to the Śaiva doctrine regarding the more or less gradual evolution of the soul (paśu) toward its own fulfillment in wisdom, grace and love of the Lord.

makes spiritual integration, cooperation and tolerance possible. The Liṅgōdbhava myth clarified the goal of Śaiva Siddhānta which focused attention on the bond linking all Śaivas; the Pañcakṛtya myth conveyed the progressive character of the redemptive process which quite clearly made allowance for religious differences.

In effect, the function of both myths was to provide a mental backdrop for understanding Mūlar's conciliatory vision of the dynamics involved in relating to the Lord and to one's fellow devotees. The critical role played by these myths can be appreciated when one recognizes the extent to which the religious outlook and behavior of individuals and groups are subtly but significantly inspired, guided and reinforced by their dominant operative myths. Consider, for example, how the Puruṣa Sūkta myth of the Ṛg Veda[1] helped to institutionalize the Aryan perception of what was normative

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[1] X.90. In this myth, the four basic castes or social classes (varṇa) are described as having originated from various portions of Puruṣa's (the cosmic 'Person') body, i.e., Brahmins from the mouth of Puruṣa, the warrior-class from his arms, the merchants or vaiśya from his thighs, and the śūdras or low caste people from his feet. In St. Paul's exhortation to the Corinthians we find an equally compelling example of the rallying power of an operative myth which, in this instance, is that of the Resurrection: "If Christ has not been raised, then our preaching is in vain and your faith is in vain." (I Cor. 15.14). What Paul is saying is that, without acceptance of the myth of the Resurrection, his actions and response to Jesus would no longer make sense. The overarching horizon for Paul, is the Resurrection.

with regard to social class distinctions. An operative myth is not the focus of attention but that by which we are able to organize and interpret what happens to us and around us. In Heideggerian terms, such a myth can be said to express the "fore-meaning" which is a precondition for understanding. In the language of Hans-Georg Gadamer, operative myths can be said to project the horizon[1] against which we are able or not able to make sense of various personal experiences. With regard to the Pañcakṛtya myth, it had projected the appropriate background for appreciating and participating in Āgamic rituals and practices. Now Mūlar sought to have the practice of religious tolerance viewed in terms of the same background. For if one accepts Gadamer's thesis that the possibility of dialogue is enhanced when those taking part in the exchange can assume the same horizon,[2] then those who share in the horizon <u>expressed</u> by the Pañcakṛtya could be expected to be more open to the argument that religious diversity is a positive good precisely because that myth supports the notion of accommodating individuals in various

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[1]That is, "the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a certain vantage point." <u>Truth and Method</u> (New York: Seabury Press, 1975) p. 269. In Part II section i of this massive work, Gadamer discusses "Heidegger's disclosure of the fore-structure of understanding" and in section iv he relates this to his own notion of "horizon."

[2]Ibid., p. 79. Here Gadamer describes the artist's search for "new symbols or a new myth which will unite everyone (and which) may certainly create a public and create a community..."

stages of spiritual maturity. In the remaining chapters we will explore how other mythic references incorporated into the Tirumantiram are related to and reflect the major themes associated with Sadāśiva and the pivotal Liṅgodbhava and Pañcakṛtya myths.

V. THE APOLOGETIC FUNCTION OF MYTHIC FIGURES

In referring to the image of Sadāśiva, Tirumūlar was calling attention to the two major myths which had expanded his own theological horizon and provided him with a broad base for building up Śaiva solidarity. His experience freed him to take a fresh look at the Āgamic tradition as it was being practiced in the Southern community. In so doing, he became aware of several forms of religious behavior that inhibited spiritual growth and made it difficult to acquire the kind of insightful understanding needed to transcend existing rifts. One shortcoming was the tendency to confuse means and ends. This was evident in people who became caught up in daily religious routines but gradually lost sight of the overall purpose of their worship. Another concerned the problem of unexamined practices degenerating into mind-numbing ritualism. There was also the matter of conservative elements opposed to incorporating creative innovations who were fostering a type of religious and cultural elitism. Finally there was the issue of religious debates in which participants, inflexibly locked into predetermined positions, predictably generated more friction than enlightenment. Given the fascinating repertoire of myths, images and rituals connected with the Āgamic tradition, popular misconceptions arising from the reification of these symbols

and symbolic activities were to be expected. If Āgamic teachings and exercises were to unite devotees in their quest for the Lord and not become points of contention, then ongoing critical evaluation of one's understanding of the tradition would be essential.

Mūlar's part in all this was to encourage members of the Śaiva community to reexamine their religious assumptions and their patterns of religious behavior. A close reading of the Tirumantiram indicates that the author sought to confront his listeners on several fronts with appeals to their rational, moral and intuitive faculties. The first appeal, which will be studied in this chapter, was that directed to the rational intellect. It was apologetic in nature. That is, it was designed to present a critical, responsible and relevant restatement of the faith by taking into account both the concerns raised by contemporary historical developments and the language of argumentation which would be most meaningful for those being addressed.

APOLOGETICS EAST AND WEST

For the sake of clarifying the kind of apologetics found in the Tirumantiram, it is helpful to compare and contrast the latter with that elaborated in the more familiar Christian tradition. In Christianity, apologetic discourse has generally been thought of as a discipline designed to defend the faith against attacks from those outside or

thought to be outside the Church. Over the centuries arguments were prepared to counter objections raised by the Pagans of the Roman Empire, the Muslims of the Middle Ages and, following the Reformation, by one body of Christians against another. Only gradually did this apologia ad extra (apologetics directed outward) give way to an apologia ad intra (apologetics directed inward or to those inside). The latter was triggered by a need to systematically re-present the faith to a faithful who were being increasingly exposed to the various rationalistic, reductionistic and secularistic thought patterns which came to the fore in the post-Enlightenment period. In each instance, whether the apology was prepared for groups inside and outside the Church, the language of the defense was dictated by the cultural background of the intended audience. Positions based on Scripture were not excluded, but since the authority and interpretation of the latter were matters of dispute, their appeal was limited. For the most part, therefore, arguments and analogies were drawn from the independent disciplines of philosophy, history and the physical sciences.

A general comparison of this understanding of apologetics with that found in the Tirumantiram can be made with regard to three points. First of all, it is clear from the issues being discussed in the pāyiram (preface) of this work that Mūlar's apology is addressed not to heterodox groups but to insiders, i.e., to Southern Hindus and, more

specifically, to Tamil-speaking Śaivas. Judging from his detailed fourfold classification of Śaivas, Mūlar's audience was composed of those who had a vested personal interest in learning about how these diverse types could be related. Secondly, the apology contained in the preface indicates that it is designed to clarify Śaiva teachings rather than refute heterodox positions or objections. The strategy was to shift attention from peripheral issues where internal differences were most pronounced, to central issues where the points of convergence were more obvious. Lastly, the text shows that Mūlar prepared the defense to meet the spiritual needs of a community which he saw as being threatened not so much by outside forces as by a growing complacency with regard to their own heritage of religious debates, rituals, practices and myths. In keeping with the need to challenge the community <u>from within</u> and <u>on its own</u> terms, Mūlar opted to fashion his arguments and analogies with material drawn from Śaiva mythology.

In dealing with a population which had been exposed to Aryan mythology for several centuries, Mūlar had a certain advantage. He could count on the narratives being familiar and on recollections of them being triggered by only brief allusions. Such allusions were already commonplace in the compositions of the Caṅkam and Tēvāram poets. What was needed, then, was not a further recounting of the main

storyline but a way of so collecting and organizing these mythic references that a fairly systematic yet popular understanding of the main teaching of Śaiva Siddhānta would emerge. This was the project Mular seems to have taken upon himself.

His apologia or defense of the faith is most evident in the payiram of the Tirumantiram. There he lays the groundwork for justifying and reconciling religious diversity within the Southern Śaiva community. The first step involved clarifying those metaphysical teachings of Śaiva Siddhānta which dealt with the necessary preconditions of celestial and terrestial existence, since these specified the relationship between the One and the many. The opening verse provides a very basic description of Śiva as the central reality on which all other entities depend in quite cryptic, abstract terms:

> He Himself is one; the second is His grace (arul)
> He is the three; He is witnessed in all the four;
> The five He conquered; the six He filled;
> The seven He pervades; the eight He manifests.[1]

The ambiguous language is typical of the Tamil siddhars. In the succeeding verses, however, there is a noticeable

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[1] oṉṟavaṉ tāṉē iraṇṭavaṉ iṉṉarul
niṉṟaṉaṉ mūṉṟiṉul nāṅkuṇarn tāṉaintu
veṉṟaṉaṉ āṟu virintaṉaṉ ēḻumparc
ceṉṟaṉaṉ tāṉirun tāṉuṇarn teṭṭē
(TM 1).

Commentators such as A. Visvanatha Pillai interpret the

shift to a more popular style of writing in which the relationship between the One and the many is elaborated in terms of the mythological horizon associated with the first salvific operation of the Pañcakrtya, namely, creation.

AS IT WAS IN THE BEGINNING

In the Tirumantiram, creation (śrsti) provides the authoritative setting for the dramatic unfolding of primordial patterns that appeal to both the will and the intellect. Mythologically speaking, creation refers to a 'time' when or an eternally normative realm where the true relationship between the One and the many is clearly established. Through the recounting of creation, the listener is given a privileged glimpse of how it was in the beginning when the devas (heavenly powers) and amarar (immortals) first came into being. In this setting, the apologetic intent of the broad array of mythic references is evident.

The One and the Many

On earth there may be some doubt or confusion about

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numerical references as follows: The One is the Supreme Śiva; two, Śiva and Śakti; three, the trimūrti or trinity of Brahmā, Viṣnu and Rudra; four, the Vedas; five, sense-cravings; six, Vedāṅgas or adhvas (cosmic or microcosmic pathways or realms); seven, worlds; eight, the aṣta mūrtis which consist of the five elements (earth, air, fire, water, ether), time (the sun and moon) and the yajamana or soul. The last, being the highest manifestation of the Lord within the individual, is the most important.

which deity is to be worshipped as the one God or as to how to compare the various deities in terms of their roles and spheres of authority. In its own way, the well-known notion of the trimūrti[1] or Hindu trinity contributed to this confusion by ascribing the operations of creation, preservation and destruction to the devas Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Rudra (Śiva) respectively. In heaven, there was no such uncertainty if one looks to the account presented in the Tirumantiram. To set the record straight, one must return to the beginning. As the drama unfolds, the viewer sees that all three phases of the cosmological process are totally dependent on the presence of one God, namely, Śiva who is described as the Holy One who sustains (Tml. mannum) all life, as the Lord of the lady (i.e., Śakti) who personifies his creative will, and as Kūrrutaittōn,[2] the One who kicked the deva of death (i.e., Yama).[3] It also becomes apparent that a clear distinction must be made between Śiva as the Absolute God and the three members of the trimūrti.

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[1]The notion of the trimūrti was a somewhat artificial theological construct disseminated from the time of Candra Gupta in the early 4th Century A.D. It was appropriate that Mūlar should refer to it in numerous verses because it was more of a Śaivite than Vaiṣṇavite doctrine. The latter theologized in terms of avatāras or descents; it was the Śaivas who were inclined to refer to the trimūrti.

[2]This title of Śiva recalls the incident where the latter is said to have saved a young Śaiva devotee known as Markanteya from the clutches of Yama, the God of death.

[3]This threefold description of Śiva is given in verse 2 of the Tirumantiram.

Śiva is not one among many but, rather, the Source upon whom the many must depend.

> He (Śiva) is like the beginning itself,
> more ancient than the Three.[1]
>
> Without Him (i.e., Śiva), the Three can
> accomplish nothing.[2]
>
> The incomparable One terminates the fleshly
> birth of Māl (i.e., Viṣṇu), of Ayaṉ (i.e.,
> Brahmā) and of other heavenly beings.[3]

Śiva is unequalled. The celestial pattern of worship confirms this by showing him to be a God "whom (all) the devas (Tml. tēvarkaḷ) adore daily,"[4] yet who Himself worships none.[5] There is no God like Śiva, not even among the great Three. To reinforce this critical truth, Mūlar alludes to the easily visualized myth of Viṣṇu's avatāra (descent) as a dwarf who, in three measured steps, retakes the whole world from under the control of a demon-tyrant named Bali. Referring to Viṣṇu simply as "the one who measured the earth" (Tml. maṉṉaḷantāṉ),[6] he proceeds to contrast this image with that of Śiva of whom it is said:

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[1] muṉṉaiyop pāyuḷḷa mūvarkku mūttavaṉ (TM 7 a).

[2] avananṟi mūvarāl āvatoṉ ṟillai (TM 6 c).

[3] vāṉa...mālayaṉ vāṉavar
ūṉap piṟavi oḻikkum oruvaṉai (TM 21 a,b).

[4] ulappili tēvarkaḷ nakkaṉeṉ ṟēttiṭu (TM 3 a,b).

[5] taṉṉāl toḻappaṭu vārillai tāṉē (TM 9 d).

[6] TM 13.

There is no one to measure Him who measured
the heavens
Transcending all (eṅkum kaṭantu), it is He
who measures everything.[1]

Kaṭantum meaning 'to transcend,' is the verb form of the Tamil noun kaṭavul which Tamils used as the preferred generic designation for God since the time of Tolkāppiyam and the period of early Caṅkam literature. In choosing this word to convey the Śaiva understanding of God, the author of the Tirumantiram was linking the Sanskrit and Tamil tradition and showing that the religious vocabulary of the latter was able to generate valuable insights into the nature of the Ultimate. When this Tamil expression is repeated in relation to each of the members of the trimūrti, the apologetic thrust becomes quite evident.

kaṭantuniṉ rāṉ kama lammala rāti
kaṭantuniṉ rāṉ kaṭal vaṇṇan em māyaṉ
kaṭantuniṉ rāṉ avark kappuṟam īcaṉ
kaṭantuniṉ rāṉ eṅkum kaṇṭu niṉṟāṉē

He transcended the one of the Lotus seat,
(i.e., Brahmā);
He transcended the ocean-hued one (i.e., Viṣṇu)
and Māyaṉ (i.e., Rudra);
He transcended Īśan who is superior (to these);
He transcended (all these) and remains witnessing
all.

TM 14[2]

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[1] viṇṇaḷan tāṉtaṉṉai mēl aḷantārillai
kaṇṇaḷan teṅkuṅ kaṭantuniṉ rāṉē (TM 13 c,d).

[2] If one were to interpret this passage in yogic terms, one would have to visualize the six cakras or spiritual energy centers located within the body and the particular devas associated with each as follows:

The Giver and the Gift

If the above verse identifies Śiva as the all-seeing Transcendent One, the verse that follows presents a complementary image of this God as the Immanent One who himself becomes Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Rudra in order to pervade and abide within the microcosm of the human body.

> Becoming Brahmā, becoming Hara (Rudra)
> And becoming Viṣṇu, he pervades, fills and
> abides within the body
> As the gracious light, the ever-expansive one,
> The everlasting one who is the embodiment of
> justice[1]

This verse may be read in two ways. From the macrocosmic perspective, it refers to the soteriological orientation of the cosmological processes presided over by the devas of the trimūrti. Taken in this way, the stanza brings out the fundamental Śaiva belief that the world has been

Ajña Cakra	Sadāśiva as witness	reveals
Vissudha C.	Maheśvara also known as Īśan	obscures
Anahata C.	Rudra	destroys (involves)
Maṇipurakam C.	Viṣṇu	preserves
Śradhistana C.	Brahmā	creates (evolves)
Mūladhara		

In this interpretation, we find a microcosmic version of the Pañcakritya. We also find that Sadāśiva is the designation of the Lord of the saving acts who bestows the fullness of grace.

> [1]ātiyu māy araṉāy uṭaluḷ niṉṟa
> vētiyu māyvirintārntirun tāṉ aruḷ
> cōtiyu māyccūruṅ kātōr tanmaiyuḷ
> nītiyu māynitta makininṟāṉē
>
> (TM 15).

evolved for the purpose of liberating individual souls (paśus). Viewed from the microcosmic perspective of the yogī, these lines can be read as referring to Śiva as he is manifested in the kuṇḍalinī energy surging up from the mūlādhāra located at the base of the spine and steadily transcending the deva guardians associated with the various cakras as it moves upward through the body and graciously illumines the individual from within. Whichever reading is followed, the message remains the same; the Witness, the all-knowing One is, at the same time, the Revealer who reveals Himself in creation and within those He created. As such, Śiva is both the Giver and the Gift, the rain and the rain-laden cloud:

> If one were to look near and far
> (One would see) there is no God greater than
> my Primal Lord
> He is in the effort exerted and
> He is the terminus of the effort
> Called Nandi, He is himself the rains
> and the rain-laden clouds.[1]

As the apologetic exposition continues we see that this Gift is the true wealth and that it is made available to all individuals. Both of these points are brought out in Mūlar's recounting of the well-known myth of Kubera. According to the narrative recorded in the Śiva Purāṇa,[2]

---

[1] ayalum puṭaiyumen ātiyai nōkkil
iyalum perunteyvam yātumoṉ ṟillai
muyalum muyalil mutivumaṟ ṟaṅkē
peyalum maṟaimukiṟ pērnanti tāṉē (TM 11).

[2] Rudra Saṁhitā, Sec. 1, Ch. 19.

Kubera was an ardent devotee of Śiva who was rewarded for his tapas (ascetic fervor) by being made the lord of wealth and being given charge of the northern city of Alakai near Kailāsa. This gesture of friendship was initiated by Śiva Himself. In the Tirumantiram, these boons and the generosity of the bestower are duly noted:

> Seeing full of tapas, making him the
> Lord of wealth,
> (And) making him the great lord (of the North),
> the king of Alkai,
> (And) conserving the wealth adorning that town
> (atupati),
> My Lord (Śiva) said (to him): "Have this town"
> (itupati).[1]

Read by itself, this verse simply calls to mind facets of the mythic narrative outlined above. When read in conjunction with the succeeding verse, however, a second more symbolic interpretation suggests itself. If verse 18 celebrates the greatness of Kubera who was given lordship over itu pati (this town, this world, this body), "the Lord of the Lord of Wealth"[2] is One who possesses the power to reduce the latter (i.e., itu pati) to the status of a cremational grounds. On the other hand, the same verse brings out His willingness to take up residence in the heart (here

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[1] atipati ceytu aḷakai vēntaṉai
nitipati ceyta niṟaitava nōkki
atupati yātarit tākkam tākkiṉ
itupati koḷḷeṉṟa emperumāṉē
(TM 18)

[2] TM 28c.

referred to as atu pati or 'that town') of one who practices true tapas (mey tavam).[1] Rereading verse 18 in light of these comments, one begins to look at the traditional narrative in a new way. One sees that the true tapas is the quest for the Lord who dwells within. The true wealth is the knowledge of this Lord. The term "atu pati" (that town) refers to the heart adorned with this wealth[2] while the term "itu pati" (this town) designates the body. This means that what happened to Kubera is not unique; it can happen to others as well. Because of Śiva, it is possible for others to become like Kubera, to become lords of an imperishable treasure and to receive a similar mandate over their own bodies. All that is asked of individuals is that they look within themselves to encounter the One who holds authority

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[1] itu pati ēlaṅ kamaḻ poḻil ēḻum
mutu pati ceytavaṉ mūtaṟi vāḻaṉ
vitu pati ceytavaṉ meyttavam nōkki
atu pati yāka amarukiṉ ṟāṉē

He who possesses primeval wisdom,
who made this spicy, fragrant, sevenfold world
like a crematorial ground;
He who fixed the chandrakal (i.e., who gave
the yogic path),
Looking at true tapas, He willingly resides in
that town (atu pati)

[2] This verse reminds one of the perceptive biblical passage which observes that where one's treasure is, there, also, will be one's heart. (Mt. 6.21).

over birth and death.[1] For Mūlar, true tapas (mey tavam) does not require the multiplication of arbitrary deprivations but a commitment to the demanding task of seeing Śiva jñānam, knowledge of Śiva.

The Obstacle and its Removal

To encourage such a commitment, followers are reassured about the Lord's ability to overcome ignorance. This point is gotten across by reminding his Tamil-speaking audience of the mythic episode of Gajaha wherein Śiva fells and flays a forest elephant sent against him by his enemies.[2] On the surface, this appears to be a simple reference to one of the well-loved and frequently cited heroic deeds of the aṣṭa vīrattas.[3] If, however, one does not view this verse in isolation but considers it in relation to the apologetic theme being developed in adjoining stanzas, then it can be argued that the elephant is meant to be taken as a symbol of malam or the impurity of spirit

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[1] TM 20.

[2] TM 21c. This Purāṇic myth describes how a group of Ṛsis performed a sacrifice to destroy Śiva who had won the affection of their wives. Various destructive objects including an elephant were sent forth against Śiva. He neutralizes the impact of all the objects but in particular that of the elephant which he flays and whose hide he victoriously dons.

[3] That this episode was well received by the Tamils can be gathered from the frequent allusions to this episode in the hymns of the Tēvāram poets. Cuntarar alone refers to the elephant 57 times.

largely associated with ignorance. In numerous quatrains preceding verse 21, Śiva is repeatedly described as being all-knowing and as being the One who bestows knowledge of Himself. In the subsequent quatrains (22-25), Śiva is further addressed as the Ruler of Māyā (illusion),[1] as the God of (illuminating) fire,[2] as the One who stands by those who change their deluded hearts,[3] and as the One who assures the termination of māyā.[4] From the context, we may conclude that just as the myth of Kubera represents Śiva's readiness to bestow the wealth of inner knowledge, the myth of Gajāha symbolizes the destruction of inner obstacles to that knowledge.[5] This is to be seen as the ultimate purpose of the overt forces of cosmic dissolution as well, insofar as experience of impermanence motivates one to search for a more lasting Reality. In terms of its social implications, this interpretation would incline one to see ignorance as the 'common enemy.' And were this truth adequately realized, individuals and groups would be freer to pool their

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[1] māyanāṉ nāṭaṉ (TM 22a).

[2] vaṉṉikkiṟai (TM 23a).

[3] māyaluṟṟa cintaiyai / maṟṟi niṉ ṟarvali maṉṉiniṉ ṟāṉē (TM c,d).

[4] māyā viruttamum āmē (TM 25d).

[5] This allegorical interpretation is also found in the hymns of Cuntarar, in particular decade 100. For a summary of his approach see Dorai Rangaswamy, Religion and Philosophy, Vol. 1, Ch. 4, and Vol. 2, Ch. 97.

resources and concentrate their energies on overcoming this central obstacle than in contending with one another over peripheral issues.

ON EARTH AS IN HEAVEN

Having thus far presented Śiva as knower (creator), bestower (preserver) and remover of obstacles (destroyer), Mūlar proceeds to describe one other facet of the Lord's gracious nature - His divine accessibility. It should be noted that, at this point in the text, apologetic statements become juxtaposed with kerygmatic[1] ones. The effect is such that the logical and mythological exposition of the faith is balanced out by an infusion of emotive declarations. This combination reminds us that the Tirumantiram is not a treatise on the scientific study of religion. It is a manual of religious instruction whose main objective is not to disseminate information about the nature of evolution or about the subsidiary roles of devas or even about Śiva, but to evoke an existential experience of the reality of these truths. For Mūlar, there can be no such thing as objective knowledge of God, if by this one means a detached understanding of a sacred object. There can be no such thing

[1] In Greek, kerygma (κηρυγμα) means 'proclamation' In Tamil, kūrram (கூற்றம்) means the same and this is the word Mūlar employs at the outset in verse 2 when he writes tānaiyān kūrukinrēnē, "Him I proclaim!"

precisely because true knowledge of God requires love (anpu).

> The ignorant think that love and God
> are two;
> They do not know that love is God.[1]

To love objectively is a contradiction in terms because love moves a person beyond the subject-object duality which objectivity presupposes.

Divine Accessibility and the Human Response

Importance of Worship. Mūlar's God was not one who kept himself at a distance. His graciousness, like that of the Tamil kings who welcomed wandering bards, was marked by His accessibility. This truth is appropriately introduced in emotive kerygmatic language. "Indeed, you, too can be united with Him"[2]; "Some say, 'God does not love me' but even to those who deny Him, He remains by their side sheltering them"[3]; "Day and night he pours out (His) grace."[4]

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[1] anpu civamiraṇ ṭeṇpar aṟivilār
anpē civimāva tārum aṟikilār.
(TM 270 a,b)

Tamil scholar T. P. Meenakshi Sundaranar observes that although anpu had initially denoted mundane love, "the Caṅkam poets idēalized it so much that it becomes the absolute love, which is the inner principle of this universe and human life. Therefore it was easy for Tirumūlar to identify love with Śiva." The Pageant of Tamil Literature (Madras: Sekar Pathippagam, 1966), pp. 26, 27.

[2] kūṭalumāmē (TM 21d).

[3] eṉakkiṟai aṉpilaṉ enpar iṟaivaṉ
piṟaikkaṇiṉ ṟārpakkam peṇi niṉṟāṉē
(TM 22 c,d).

[4] allum pakalum aruḷukiṉṟāṉē (TM 23d).

Śiva outdoes even the most outgoing of the early royal patrons in that He does not wait for others to direct devotees to Him, rather, He Himself offers to become their guide (valittunai).[1]

What then is the proper response to such graciousness? The answer is disarmingly simple. "Worship Him (tolumin)!"[2] "Bow low before Him with hands prayerfully raised (vanaṅki)."[3] "Honor Him and sing His praises (porricait tumpukalntum)."[4] "Consecrate your treasures to His (sacred) feet (civanatik kecelva mārriya)."[5] "Glorify my Lord! (For) you can be united with Him also (eṅ kōnai pukalumin kūtalumāmē)."[6] "In whatever manner you praise Him, in that same manner you will receive grace from the Lord."[7] To this list, Mūlar adds his own personal faith responses interspersed with allusions to various mythic figures.

> The One who spurned the deva of death,
> Him I proclaim![8]

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[1] TM 28d.

[2] TM 25c, 26a.

[3] TM 27c, 28d.

[4] TM 24a. See also Appar: "Dance, worship, weep, sing!" (Tēvāram 177.8).

[5] TM 24b, c.

[6] TM 21d.

[7] eppari cāyiṉum ēttumiṉ ēttiṉāl
appari cīcaṉ aruḷ peṟa lāmē (TM 36c, d).

[8] ...teṉ ticaik koru vēntanām
kūṟṟutait tāṉaiyāṉ kūṟukiṉṟēṉē (TM 2c, d).

> The Mendicant (Śiva) whom the immortal devas adore
> ...Him I enter into, meditate upon and worship.[1]
> He is like the beginning itself, more ancient than
> the three.
> He is the peerless leader with whom none can compare.
> (Yet) call him, "father" (appa) and He becomes
> like a father.[2]
>
> "Glory to the Holy Feet," the immortals (amamar) chant,
> "Glory to the Holy Feet," the asuras chant,
> "Glory to the Holy Feet," humans also chant.
> I, too, glorified (them) and thereby "caused" them
> to be made manifest in love.[3]

Ordinarily Śiva is upheld as the Cause but here the prayerful devotee is pictured as the spontaneous 'cause.'

Meaning of True Worship. According to the Tirumantiram, worship is essential because Śiva "will be the guide on the (inner) path only for those who worship."[4] In urging individuals to approach the Lord in this manner, however, Mūlar was careful to make a clear distinction between worshipping (vaṇaṅkiya) and doing rituals (viti ceyya); these were neither to be confused nor equated. This distinction is important in Mūlar's apology and it made with the help of a mythic scenario which suggests that those who know how to

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[1] nakkaṉeṉ ṟēttiṭu nātaṉai nāṭoṟum
pukku niṉ ṟuṉṉiyāṉ pōṟṟi cey vēṉē (TM 3b,d).

[2] muṉṉaiyop pāyuḷḷa mūvarkku mūttavaṉ
taṉṉaiyop pāyoṉṟum illāt talaimakaṉ
taṉṉaiyap paeṉil appaṉu māyulaṉ (TM 7a,b,c).

[3] pōṟṟieṉ parama rarpuṇi taṇaṭi
pōṟṟieṉ paracu rarpuṇi taṇaṭi
pōṟṟieṉ pārmaṇi tarpuṇi taṇaṭi
pōṟṟieṉ aṉpuḷ poliyavait tēṉē (TM 44).

[4] vaṇaṅkiniṉ ṟarkkē valittuṇaiyamē (TM 28d).

perform fixed rituals are not necessarily the ones who know how to worship. The latter is something that must come from the heart (neñcu).

> In the past this world had many gods
> Many ritualistic injunctions (viti), too,
> but the One Truth (onru meymmai) they
> did not know.
> Even those who are able to recite many
> prayers praise (with their lips)
> If they have not seen in their heart (neñcu),
> they (can only) wilt.[1]

Ways of Worshipping. So individuals are exhorted to seek out the generous Lord not with costly sacrifices or elaborate Vedic chants or formal religious gestures, but in the manner of the poor Tamil pāṇars (bards) who approached the ruler with nothing more than a song of praise in their hearts and on their lips. Arriving creatively empty they came away filled to overflowing.

> Bending in prayer, they raise (their hearts) and
> voices saying 'my Lord'
> Thus effecting closeness, they attain the Lord's
> grace.[2]

The formality of various Vedic viti (Skt. vidhi) with their detailed rubrics regarding the positioning of altars, the direction to be faced by an officiating priest and the precise formulations to be said, stand in marked contrast

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[1] patipala vāyatu paṇṭiv vulakam
vitipala ceytonru meymmai uṇarār
tutipala tōntiraṅ collaval lārum
matiyilar neñciṉul vāṭukiṉ rārē (TM 33).

[2] ēttiyum emperu mān eṉ riraiñciyum
āttañcey tīcaṉ arulpeṟa lāmē (TM 39c, d)

to the spontaneity of the Tamil bhakti cult with its enthusiastic celebration of the Lord's name in music, song and dance.

> Our Lord who is the Lord of the devas and of
> all ten directions.....
> How we sing of His grace![1]
>
> The Lord (who is present everywhere) become the
> Uncreated Path
> Having adored (Him), you should continue to adore,
> Having praised you should continue to praise
> In the east and west and all directions
> He will put you on the path and, in that way,
> cause you to dance.[2]
>
> I wreath (Him), I place (Him) in the centre
> of my heart.
> I sing (pāṭuvaṉ), "O Lord!" bowing and strewing
> many flowers.
> I dance (āṭuvaṉ)' the dancing Lord of the
> immortals (amarar)
> I seek; now this alone is what I know.[3]

By thus promoting the Muttamil tradition of music, song and dance, Mular was clearly seeking to defend the less restrained, more free flowing approach of the Tamil bhaktas. As a yogi coming from the eclectic siddhar tradition, he was working to dissuade his listener from measuring

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[1] tēvar pirāṉnam pirāṉ ticai pattaiyum.
pāvu pirāṉ aruṭ pāṭalu māmē (TM 32 a,d).

[2] ārṟuki lāvaḻi yākum iṟaivaṉaip
poṟṟumiṉ pōṟṟip pukaḻmiṉ pukaḻntiṭil
mēṟṟicaik kuṅkiḻak kuṭṭicai eṭṭoṭu
māṟṟuvaṉ appaṭi yāṭṭavu māmē (TM 35).

[3] cūṭuvaṉ neñcitai vaippaṉ pirāṉeṉṟu
pāṭuvaṉ paṉmalar tūvip paṇintuniṉ
ṟaṭuvaṉ āṭi amararpi rāṉeṉṟu
nāṭuvaṉ yāṉiṉ ṟaṟivatu tāṉē (TM 50).

spirituality in terms of the externals of religion which inevitably vary from group to group. The means are not insignificant but they need not set one group against another. Various forms of worship are acceptable to Śiva. For though He himself is the uncreated form (piravā uruvanai)[1] and is above all sects, creeds and religious groupings, He nevertheless makes Himself present as the Vedic fire which illumines the inner and outer worlds[2] and as the great cosmic dancer whose favorite sabha (dance hall) is the devotee's heart.[3] True worship, whether it be of the Vedic, Āgamic or Tamil bhakti variety, requires humility, not comparative boasting. The one who desires to approach the victorious anklet of the Lord's foot, must first decrease (kurai) in size.[4] Those who worship in this spirit, come to understand the conciliatory message suggested by the mythic exploit in which Śiva heroically swallows the poison stirred up by well-intentioned but misguided devas, and, like a deer separated from its herd, they subsequently become joined with the Lord who has the harmony-creating woman (i.e.,

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[1] TM 38 b.

[2] "He stood before me with a complexion resembling fire" tāṉumniṉ rāṉtaḷal tānokku mēṉiyaṉ (TM 37b).

[3] "In the center of my heart. I place and wreathe ... the dancing Lord. (TM 50 a,c).

[4] TM 40. This verse is similar to the scriptural passage from Jn. 3.30: "I must decrease that He may increase."

Pārvatī) at his side.[1]

Here we have another example of how Mūlar utilizes myth in an apologetic way. Arguing from analogy, he invites his listeners to see religious strife as the poison which the Śaiva community must allow Śiva to consume once again. Judging from the number of exhortations to worship, Mūlar seems to trust that when this act is wholeheartedly directed to Śiva it will lead devotees beyond their factions to a point where they can actually celebrate the fact that the Lord chooses to come in diverse ways -

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[1] ciṉañceyta nañcuṇṭ tēvar pirāṉaip
puṉañceyta neñcitai pōṟṟaval lārkkuk
kaṉañceyta vāṇutal pākaṉum āṅkē
iṉañceyta mānpōl iṉaṅkiniṉ ṟāṉē

The Lord God, swallower of the poison born of strife,
(That Lord) who has the music-creating woman at His side
He joins to Himself the cultivated heart that can praise.
He becomes like a deer joined to its herd.
(TM 41)

The story of Śiva swallowing poison was known to the Caṅkam poets. (Puṟam 91). It recalls the incident which occurred when the devas, in search of a substance (ambrosia) which would make them immortal, churned an ocean of milk. A mountain was used as the churning post and a serpent as the rope. Viṣṇu made himself the support for the post. The first substance to emerge was a life-threatening poison which Śiva immediately consumed. Pārvatī, who was near Him, then pressed His throat to prevent the poison from entering His stomach.

To those who proclaim the feet of Hara (Śiva)
with weeping,
To others who seek the Lord's feet, meditating
daily (and)
To still others who secure knowledge of the Feet
by retreating into solitude.[1]

There can be little doubt that Mūlar expects Śiva Himself to instruct those who worship and, at some point in the instruction, show them the value of both the vitivali, the ordered (Vedic) path and the tutivali, the (bhakta) path of praising.[2]

The former offers guidance for this world of birth and death, and latter leads one to the inner Lord of Light who illumines the path for transcending what is. In terms of reaching the goal of loving union with Śiva, singing, dancing and strewing flowers are clearly affirmed as appropriate religious responses.[3] This was not to say that the worship associated with the Tamil bhaktas was to displace other

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[1] aranti colli arar̄ri aḷutu
paraṇati nāṭiyē pārippa nāḷum
uraṇaṭi ceytaṅ kotuṅkaval lārkku
(TM 43 a, b, c).

[2] TM 45. In this verse, Mūlar seems to say that the role of the viti or Vedic and tuti or bhakti paths can best be understood from the perspective of the ultimate destination here referred to as pativali, a term which could be variously translated as 'the way to the city, to the temple or body, to the Lord or as the way to mukti (liberation).'

[3] TM 50.

forms of worship but to show that, in their own distinctive way, these bhaktas had access to the truths of the Vedas and Āgamas.

The argument Mūlar uses parallels that found in the New Testament[1] where Peter, surprised to find an intense faith in God among a group of Gentiles, takes this as a sign of God's acceptance of them and proceeds to officially welcome them into the community of the baptized, the twice-born. Similarly, Mūlar seeks to dispel any notion that the Tamil bhaktas should be viewed as inimical or alien to the more formal religion of the Vedic and Āgamic branches of Śaivism. They are seen to have a spirit of devotion which is welcomed by Śiva and which deserves explicit recognition if not outright imitation. Having thus argued that Śiva has, in fact, already made Himself accessible to the Tamil bhaktas, Mūlar proceeds to offer a critical assessment of the way in which Śiva is made accessible to such devotees in and through the Vedas and Āgamas.

Accessibility in the Scriptures

In the section entitled "Veta Cirappu" (the Specialness of the Vedas),[2] Mūlar directs his apologetic remarks

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[1]Acts 10.44-48.

[2]Tantra I, Sec. 2, Vs. 51-56.

to the adherents of the Brahmanical tradition. His praise for the Vedas is unequivocal: "In the Vedas is the entire dharma that is worthy to be preached and (practiced)."[1] Yet he challenges those who would presume to equate recitation of the mantras with realization of their import: "One who recites the Vedas, does not (necessarily) become a knower of Brahman."[2] Alluding to the traditional Āgamic myth of the Vedas having originated from Śiva, Mūlar stresses that Śiva spoke the Vedas in order to reveal the Revealer.[3] To this end He not only gave Brahmins the karma kaṇḍa in order to guide their rituals but also gave the jñāna kaṇḍa or philosophical portion of the Vedas in order to lead them to the True Reality (mey porul) hidden within their words.[4] Liberation, which is synonymous with bliss (ananda), is presented in the Tirumantiram not as a product of ethical or ritual behavior but as a grace (arul) that accompanies loving understanding (ñāna) and understanding love (anpu). It is not action that determines knowledge, rather it is knowledge which informs and qualifies 'the

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[1]TM 51 a,b. vetattiṉ otat takum aram ellāmula

[2]TM 52 a.

[3]As against the Mīmāṁsā position which holds that they are apauruṣeya (not given by a deity) and nitya (eternal).

[4]TM 52 b, c, d. The terms karma kaṇḍa and jñāna kaṇḍa are interpretations of the word "Vetam" which is repeated in each line of this verse. The interpretation followed here is drawn from the commentator A. Visvanatha Pillai.

doing,' thereby raising the latter to the status of a saving action, a holy means. Those who have difficulty discovering the True Reality hidden in the mantras are urged to adopt the committed emotive stance of the Tamil bhaktas. For, according to Mūlar, it is the experience of melting with love that prepares individuals for discerning the Lord who indwells the mantric form.[1] Those who are able to keep their attention focused on the Great Path (peruneri), which is none other than the Lord Himself, are said to eventually recognize that the Śaiva and Vedānta paths basically agree.[2] The implication is that any serious religious disputes between these groups must be the result of superficial understanding and an attachment to the external fruits of their actions.[3]

True knowledge is held to overcome factions and divisions, and a supplementary way of acquiring this knowledge is through the Āgamas:

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[1] iruk kuru vāmeḻil vētattiṉuḷḷe
urukkuṇar vayuṇar vētattuḷ ōṅki
verukkuru vākiya vētiyar colluṅ
karukkuru vāyniṉṟa kaṇṇaṉu māmē

Within the beautiful Vedas there is the mantra form.
Growing within the Vedas and within the word of
the Brahmins which provoke awe,
(And known only to) one who has a melting experience
There stands, like a form within a womb, the eyed one.
(TM 53)

[2] TM 54.

[3] TM 56.

Both the Vedas and Āgamas are true
Scriptures of the Lord;
One is general, the other particular.
The one who understands, sees both are
revelations of the Lord.[1]

Like the Vedas, the Śaivāgamas are said to derive from Sadāśiva.[2] Appropriately, section three deals with the "Specialness of the Āgamas" (ākama cirappu).[3] It is distinquished by a single mythic narrative which subtly discloses the apologetic intent of the author as it is elaborated in a comparatively lengthy sequence of verses. Mūlar's goal is to justify his writing of a Tamil Āgama, more specifically, to defend his departure from tradition on this matter.

That the Āgamas as well as the Vedas were available only in the Sanskrit language can be gathered from verse 965:

The fifty letters (along with) constitute
All the Vedas and Āgamas.
When the truth of these fifty is realized,
(It will be found that) these fifty merge
in the five.[4]

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[1] TM 2397 a,b,c.

[2] mantra tantrākyam catāciva mukhodyatam
Of those (revealed), the mantra and tantra (i.e., Āgama) come from the face of Catāciva. Kāmikāgama, Tantrāvatara Patalam, vs. 20.

[3] Section 3 of Tantra I includes verses 57-66.

[4] aimpatu eḻuttē anaittu vētaṅkaḷum
aimpatu eḻuttē anaittu ākamaṅkaḷum

Like Latin, Sanskrit was not only regarded a holy language, but the ritual language of the priests who were entrusted with the performance of Vedic and Āgamic rites. Mūlar's defense of the vernacular follows a simple logic. Recitation of mantras is insufficient; for liberation, understanding is necessary; Southern Saivas are Tamil-speaking so how are they to understand the import (porul) of their religious practices unless someone explains it in their own tongue. The gist of the argument is quite logical but the rationale itself is presented in mytho-logical terms with the aid of a mythic narrative recorded in various Śaiva Āgamas. Basically, the myth describes how Śiva complies with the requests of scores of devas and ṛsis who approach Him and beseech Him to teach them the meaning of Āgamas which had come from His fifth face.[1] Because the sequence is important I will provide an uninterrupted translation of the verses before commenting on the development of the argument.[2]

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aimpatu eḻuttēyam āvatu aṟintapiṉ
aimpatu eḻuttum pōy aṅcu eḻuttāmē

A. Visvanatha Pillai explains that the 50 letters plus one refer to the letters of the Sanskrit language while the five designate the pancaksara or five-syllabled praise of Siva, i.e., na-ma-si-va-ya. (Sanskrit as it is known today has 48 letters, Tamil has only 31.)

[1]See Kāmikāgama, Tantrāvatāra Patalam vs. 4.

[2]See appendix for the verses in Tamil.

Requesting the precious meaning of the Āgamas,
twenty-eight in number,
Which the One with the dark-haired lady by His side
(Gave forth) from his fifth face,
The sixty-six (celestials) came before (Him)
bowing with folded hands. (57)

The Great God (annal) by grace graciously gave
the Sivāgamās.
If you count them they number ten million crores.
(Because of them) the celestials (vinnavar)
proclaim the Lord's excellence.
I, (also), contemplating their meaning,
worship (Him). (58)

The true pandits are those who understood
The meaning of the author of the eighteen languages.
It is for the pandits and the whole world that
The Primal Lord made the eighteen languages. (59)

By grace the great God graciously revealed the Āgamas
(Yet) in heaven, even the immortals themselves find
it difficult to know (them)
If you count the countless writings;
(You see) they are like writing on the water
(i.e., difficult to grasp). (60)

Being the Ultimate One, (Śiva) reveals Himself and
that which, leads to Him (i.e., the finite world).
At the time He proclaimed Śivadharma (=Śivapūjā)
as the world's upholder,
The immortals worshipped Him as Hara (Destroyer).
Nandi,* (who is thus worshipped) stands prominently
in the Āgamas as the knowledge that gives
spiritual strength. (61)

From Śiva, the highest, to Śakti, to Sadāśivam
To Maheśvara, to Rudra, to Viṣṇu and on to Brahmā -
By tapas the great Lord of lords successively begot
Himself in Himself
(Finally) our Nandi (Guru) begot the nine Āgamas. (62)

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*An endearing term for Śiva as Guru.

Verse 63 merely lists the nine Agamas mentioned above: the Kāraṇam, Kāmikam, Vīram, Cintam, Vātulam, Viyamalam, Kālōttaram, Cuppiram and the Makutam.

Countless are the Śivāgamas the great God graciously
revealed by his grace
If they do not understand God's wisdom
(i.e., the Āgamas)
Then the countless millions (of Āgamic verses)
Are like writing on water. (64)

In the interim between summer and the rainy season
While the lake grows thin,
At this difficult moment Śiva showed mercy (karunai)
to the Lady (Śakti)
By teaching her, at once Sanskrit and Tamil. (65)[1]

Indeed one can know Him who reveals
The mystery of binding and loosing the garland (of
life).
The passing away and ceasing of life,
Through both the Tamil language and the Sanskrit
language. (66)

From this carefully arranged sequence of mantras, a persuasive parable emerges. In response to the request of the celestials (vs. 57), Śiva reveals millions of Āgamas (vs. 58). But so profound are these scriptures that even the immortals (amarar) in heaven have difficulty understanding them (vs. 60 a,b), which means that, for all practical purposes, such revelations were "like words written on water" - too elusive to grasp (vs. 60 c,d). Their celestial

[1]This verse presents a variation of the myth in which Devī (Śakti) is rewarded by Śiva for her tapas which she performs throughout the seasons for the sake of all creatures. There, her reward is to be instructed on the meaning of om.

status not withstanding, these heavenly beings are seen to be in need of a teacher, a guru. Śiva obliges and, as part of the instruction, proclaims the way of Sivadharma, otherwise known as Śivapūjā (vs. 61). Up to this point in the narrative, Mūlar's audience may be expected to be in full agreement with the Lord's sensitivity to the plight of the celestials. It is not until the episode hits home and they find themselves in a similar situation that the parabolic impact makes itself felt. Only when they see the implications of this myth for their own lives do they come to recognize the demand it makes on them. To make the connection, verse 62 describes the bond between heaven and earth in terms of the descent or evolution of the truth proceeding from Śiva Himself to Śakti to Sadāśiva on down through the members of the trimūrti and finally becoming manifest on earth in the Śivāgamas which Śiva as Guru makes available to him. Now humans and, in particular, Tamil-speaking individuals who do not know Sanskrit, find themselves in a similar position of not being able to grasp the meaning of the Āgamas which were designed for those who sought to be united with Śiva. For them, too, these scriptures were like so many letters written on water.[1] Having succinctly

[1]Because of the similarity of the wording in verses 60 and 64 Ramanatha Pillai regards the latter as a repetition and omits it entirely. This is in keeping with his quest to limit the text to 3000 verses. In so doing he misses the parabolic impact of the repetition which connects the plight of the celestials with the plight of

drawn the parallel and posed the problem as he sees it existing in South India, Mūlar concludes his apology for use of the vernacular with an allusion to yet another mythic episode, one which shows Śiva instructing Devī in both Sanskrit and Tamil (āriyamum Tamilum).[1] From this, the reader may be expected to conclude that the Tamil is as well-suited as Sanskrit for the task of seeking the One who reveals the meaning behind the mysteries of existence.[2] As for the Tirumantiram itself, the celestials in heaven are said to ceremoniously approach Nandi chanting this garland of mantras which they constantly kept in their hearts.[3]

This analysis contrasts greatly with that offered by Ramana Sastri who argues that verses 59, 65 and 66[4] should be viewed as interpolations because "there is no ground for concluding that they are statements made by Tirumūlar in relation to the theme of the book."[5] Such a statement is convincing only if one concurs with a previously stated thesis that the Tirumantiram was a direct translation of an

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humans who do not understand Sanskrit, the language in which the Āgamas were preserved, if not composed.

[1]TM 65. The Ceylonese commentator A. Visvanatha Pillai takes this verse to say that in the beginning Śiva taught Devī the Āgamas in Sanskrit and their meaning in Tamil.

[2]TM 66.

[3]TM 86.

[4]Sastri's edition (S. ed.) verses 69, 75, 76.

[5]Ramana Sastri, The Tirumantiram (in Tamil), p. 12.

earlier Sanskrit work, the so-called Mantra Mālika and also accepts his claim that verses 59 through 98[1] were added later by Mūlar's disciples. The continuity of the mythologic of verses 57-66,[2] I submit, indicates otherwise.[3] Verses 67-94[4] are also very much to the point in that they expand the apology by explaining not only why the truth of the Āgamas ought to be made available in Tamil but why Mūlar should be the one to carry out this task. Verse 68 relates how, by Nandi's (Śiva's) grace, he (Mūlar) was designated a master (natan). As such, he had a spiritual bond with the Nandis (gurus) who went before him. Like them, he was committed to seeking the Lord dwelling within himself. It was in this context that Mūlar recited the famed verse: "By Nandi's grace we sought mūlan;"[5] mūlan here meaning the inner source. He was also moved by the same generous

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[1] S. ed. 69-108.

[2] Sastri, vss. 57-66.

[3] This is not to rule out any interpolations, however. According to Vacchiravelu Mudaliar verse 57 (S.67) should be regarded an interpolation because the specification of 28 Āgamas most likely did not antedate the reign of Rajēndra Cōla (985-1014). Personal corresponce of December 5, 1978.

If this be the case, the sequence can be taken to begin with verse 58 without hindering the parable. Verse 59 and 63 (S.69,73) may be interpolations but the weight of the parable does not rest on them. They only expand on a point that has already been made.

[4] Sastri, vss. 83-103.

[5] TM 68

By Nandi's grace we were called masters
By Nandi's grace we sought mūlan

spirit which characterized the earlier masters. If they had become lords (tēvār) and masters (nātarān) it was because of the grace-inspired selfless resolve which each of them expressed: "Let others have all that I had!"[1] To this, Mūlar rejoins, "Let this world have the joy I had!"[2] Once again the apologetic and kerygmatic approaches are kept together as the yogī author of the Tirumantiram announces why he intends "to Tamil-ize" the Lord.[3]

Mūlar was determined to offset the faulty notion that God could be found as an external reality apart from oneself. Those who habitually look outside themselves for the source of their salvation can expect to fare no better than Brahmā and Viṣṇu who, to no avail, sought to find the limits of Śiva's liṅga. The latter i.e. Viṣṇu conceded his ignorance while the former made a false claim about knowing.[4] One of the first things a devotee needs to know is where to look. To this end he designed his Tamil śāstra[5] as a guide for the inner journey.

What God's grace can do!
It showed me the way in (this) land.
Having been chosen by Nandi (Śiva), Mūlar now understands his mission to the Southern country.

[1] TM 70. nālvarum nāṉperṟa tellām perukeṉa

[2] TM 85. nāṉperṟa iṉpam peruka ivvaiyakam

[3] TM 81. tamiḻceyya

[4] TM 88.

[5] TM 87. See also verse 95 where the author writes:

Accessibility in the Meditation

Great as the masters were, however, by themselves they could not hope to have said everything there was to be said about Śiva, the Lord of birth and death. For due to the limitations of the human condition, this great deva, who is the source of all illumination, cannot possibly fully reveal his ever-surpassing greatness.[1] In other words, further exposition not only remains possible but necessary. For Mūlar, further revelation derives from a proper balance between ritual and meditation. There is a connection between Śiva's exhortation[2] to the masters to continuously perform the cool[3] (i.e., Āgamic) rites and Mūlar's decision to compose the Tirumantiram[4] while meditating on both the crescent-bedecked[5] image of Śiva and the cosmic dance of

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(Śiva) is the nameless mighty flame
(About) whose root I venture to speak.

Pēraṟi yāta peruṅcutar oṉṟatiṉ
Vēraṟi yāmai vilampukiṉ ṟēṉē

[1]TM 71.

[2]TM 72.

[3]Rituals in which offerings such as rice, water and flowers are made to an image rather than into the fire as was the case in Vedic rites.

[4]TM 73.

[5]Some commentators suggest that the matted hair of Śiva symbolized obscuration or partial revelation. In the same vein, it could be said that the reference to the moon shining forth from the hair suggests a breakthrough, a further revelation.

Śiva being performed at the sabha (hall) in Citamparam.[1] More will be said about the latter in chapter six but here let us recall that it is in this context that this yogī author describes how he abandoned his indifference to the existence of Muttamiḻ and Veda,[2] and subsequently began to see his work as an exposition of the 'Veta' or meaning of this mystic dance[3] with which Tamil Śaivas so closely identified.

In this section[4] known as the biography of Tirumūlar, the imagery of the Devī becomes quite pronounced. She is the precious one who stands beside Śiva,[5] the damsel of the sky-hued body to whom the dance, like the Āgamas, was first revealed,[6] and

> She is the bejewelled one
> whose name is unrivalled bliss. Captivating me,
> she puts an end to my births.
> She is the precious one who is a portion of the
> Lord of the cool Tiruvāṭuturai
> I unite myself to her feet.[7]

In this way, Śiva's grace is mythically represented in feminine imagery. Moreover, insofar as Devi is an expression of his will and inseparably joined to Him, references to the Lady continuously suggest the goal of yogic union:

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[1] TM 74.

[2] TM 76.

[3] TM 77. See also vs. 91 where Mūlar records how he traveled from Kailāsa to expound the meaning of great impurity-dispelling Dancer.

[4] TM 1, Sec. 5, Vss. 73-94.

[5] TM 75 b.

[6] TM 77 c,b.

[7] nēriḻai yāvāl niratica yaṉantap

I entered Nandi's city where wisdom's mistress dwells.
There I bathed the Lord with milk and worshipped Him
Without blemish for innumerable yugas (ages).
I was also there under the Bodhi tree.[1]

Ultimately ritual and meditation merge and become a single whole as the Creator, from within, graciously confers not only the body of the mantric chant but its soul or meaning as well.[2] Mūlar describes what happens. The consciousness-raising mantra grasps one's flesh till one experiences the bliss of union with the One involved.[3] Those who are filled with devotion (patti) will know this kind of experience and, like the munis and devas who individually and collectively praised Śiva with love,[4] they will be the best prepared.

Coming to the end of this preface and apologetic portion of the Tirumantiram we find that mythic figures again

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pēruṭai yāḷeṉ piṟa pparut tāṇṭavaḷ
cīruṭai yāḷciva nāvaṭu taṇṭurai
cīruṭai yāḷpataṅ cerntirun tēṉē (TM 78)

It should be noted this is the only verse entirely and exlusively dedicated to Devī.

[1]The Bodhi tree is a symbol of the quest for enlightenment. According to tradition Bodhi tree was located in Tiruvaduturai, the place where Mūlar composed the Tirumantiram.

ñāṉat talaivitaṉ nanti nakarpukku
ūṉamil oṉpatu kōṭi yukan taṉuḷ
ñāṉappā lāṭṭi nātaṉai arccittu
nāṉum iruntēṉ naṟ pōtiyiṉ kīḻē (TM 82).

[2]otta uṭalaiyum uḷniṉṟ urpatti
attaṉ eṉakkiṉ karuḷāl aḷittatē (TM 84 c,d).

[3]TM 85 c,d.

[4]TM 98.

loom large as they are used to recapitulate the central theme of unity and diversity. In a closely knit sequence of mantras we are reminded of the positions of various followers of Śiva. Apparently there are those who say that Śiva alone is unchangeable and insist that infinite greatness does not belong to either Hari (Viṣṇu) or Ayan (Brahmā).[1] Others so differentiate the members of the trimūrti that they will not say the three are one even in their lineal continuity. These persons consequently become alienated and quarrel among themselves.[2] Then there are the thoughtless ones who try to limit the limitless God (Īcaṉ).[3] The wise, on the other hand, know the nature of the true source. For they know:

> Śiva is first, then the three and the five,
> The eight derive from the One.
> With these evoke nada and bindu (name and form)
> All are but the names of Śankara (i.e., Siva)
> who is the first of the Assembly.[4]

In the next verse, Mūlar reassures the hesitant. If they really consider the path that yields the fruit of

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[1] TM 103.

[2] TM 104.

[3] TM 105.

[4] civaṉmutal mūvarō ṭaivar ciranta
avaimutal āṟiraṉ ṭoṉṟoṭoṉ ṟakum
avaimutal vintuvum nātamum ōṅkac
cavaimutaṟ caṅkaraṉ taṉpeyar tāṉē (TM 106)

According to S. Ramaswami Aiyar, the three are Rudra, Viṣṇu and Brahmā; the five include these plus Mahēśvara and Sadāśiva.

knowing, they will see that Brahmā and Viṣṇu are not alien but are kin to the three-eyed Nandi. From them also blessings can be received.[1] Such an acknowledgement was by no means minor, given the common bhakti practice of praising only the God of one's own sect.[2] Clearly the formulation was designed to undercut the ideological basis of sectarian wranglings. But in what sense are the devas understood to be our kin? Mūlar describes the bond:

> As the countless devas assembled around
> The milk-hued One and I bowed and worshipped;
> (Śiva) said (to me): "You are comparable to
> Viṣṇu and Brahmā;
> Give the world (knowledge of) my Feet.[3]

Mūlar bows before Śiva only to find himself hailed and sent out as a deva to teach the world. Whether one is called a human or a deva depends on the grace of Śiva (civanarul) but whichever one is called, the only way to know God is to realize Him from within.[4]

In the last analysis there are two kinds of people. (A) There are "the ignorant (ātarkaḷ) who do not know that

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[1] TM 107.

[2] For example, in every one of his 383 patikams, Campantar proclaims the superiority of Śiva over Brahmā and Viṣṇu.

[3] ōlakkaṅ cūḻnta ulappili tēvarkaḷ
pālotta mēṉi paṇintaṭi yēṉtoḻa
mālukkum ātip paramaṟkum oppunī
ñālattu nammaṭi nalkiṭeṉ ṟāṉē (TM 108).

[4] TM 109.

in the beginning the great shining Flame became three and then five, etc."[1] Not realizing that all these are but manifestations of the One, they jabber away and insist upon separating Īcaṉ (Rudra), Māl (Viṣṇu) and Ayaṉ (Brahmā).[2] (B) There are the learned (arivar) who recognize the One Lord in His manifold manifestations. They see Śiva as having become Viṣṇu and Brahmā at the onset of creation in order to join with the world and initiate the dramatic unfolding necessary for releasing it from its fetters. More importantly, they are aware that they must look for His hidden yet abiding presence within their own bodies.[3] In other words, they know both the single Flame that signals the Oneness which transcends and transforms contending parties and they know the progressive character of salvation which allows for a patient unfolding of religious development.

These insights regarding the relationship of pati (Śiva) to pāśam (the world) and to paśu (the individual) reflect the central themes of the Liṅgodbhava and Pañcakṛtya myths and return our attention to the image of Sadāśiva, the Revealer, who is described in the final verse of the pāyiram. The description is similar to that found in the

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[1] TM 110 a,b.

[2] TM 110 c,d.

[3] TM 111.

Puruṣa Sūkta hymn of the Ṛg Veda and, like the latter, it lays stress on the creative power of the One God rather than on the derived powers of the created deities.

tanoru kūṟu catācivaṉ emiṟai
vāṉoru kūṟu maruviyum aṅkuḷāṉ
kōṉoru kūṟutal uḷniṉ ṟuyirkkiṉṟa
rāṉoru kūṟu calamaya nāmē

A portion of my Lord is Sadāśiva
With one part He resides there in the heavens,[1a]
With one part He comes to life within the body,[b]
With yet another part He becomes the creator of movement.[c]

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[1]a. The heavenly part refers to the five bhūtas or elements.

b. The portion in the body is the ātman (self).

c. The creator of movement refers to the bodies of time, i.e., the sun and the moon.

Together these complete the list of eight (aṣṭa mūrtas) which had been mentioned in the opening verse of the Tirumantiram.

VI. THE TROPOLOGICAL AND ANAGOGICAL FUNCTIONS OF MYTHIC FIGURES

Throughout the Tirumantiram, Mūlar seeks to promote knowledge of Śiva as Sadāśiva,[1] that is, as the Lord who makes Himself available by revealing His five merciful operations.[2] The apology developed in the preface served to describe, in general terms, the nature of these saving deeds and the accessibility of the One to be known. It also sought to convince the listener of the importance of knowing as well as of the need to make this knowledge available in the vernacular. In addition to the presentation of apologetic statements about Śiva, Mūlar introduced anagogical and tropological motifs in order to discuss (a) the actual experience of knowing Śiva as well as the (b) the practical steps leading to that experiential

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[1] TM 86.

[2] malaṅkalain tāmeṉa māṟṟi aruḷit
talaṅkalain tāṉaṟ catāciva māṉa
pulaṅkalain tānap potuviṉuḷ nanti
nalaṅkalain tāṉuḷ nayantāṉ aṟintē

Graciously transforming the five malas (impurities),
As Sadāśiva he entered the five spheres,
As Nanti He entered within the sabha of the five senses
Knowing all, He directed His fivefold operations within the soul.
(TM 118)

See also vss. 400, 401, 403, 404.

knowledge.

In the previous chapter we saw how mythic figures were utilized to develop various apologetic motifs. There, the devas were presented either as aspects of Śiva Himself or else as noble, highly developed souls who were totally dependent on Him for their existence.[1] There, the positive image of both groups of devas was useful not only for showing the greatness of Śiva but also for underscoring the greatness of the gift bestowed on Mūlar and other devotees like him, who were given access to facets of Śiva that even those "standing by His side do not know!"[2] Here, in this chapter, we will explore the two additional ways in which mythic figures were employed in the Tirumantiram to increase the devotees understanding of the goals and means of Āgamic Śaivism. One way was by incorporating mythic imagery to evoke a feel for the mystical experience brought about by the union of the individual with the Lord. Where this thrust is evident and lends itself to symbolic or allegorical interpretation, the mythic figures can be said

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[1] In Śaiva Siddhānta theology, devas are thought of either as karaṇēśvaras (causal powers) or as kāryēśvaras (created powers). The former include the members of the Hindu trinity (trimūrti) when they are understood to be emanations of Śiva Himself as in verses 7, 14, 15, and others. The kāryēśvaras include Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva and other devas when they are presented as devout souls who, by virtue of their tapas and puṇya (merit) were given jurisdiction over distinct spheres of the universe. These are devas by divine appointment and are subject to do His bidding. S. Satchidanandam Pillai, Collected Lectures, 1952, pp. 15-17. [2] pakka niṉ ṟar aṟi yāta paramaṉai (TM 3c).

to have an anagogical function.[1] Where mythic figures are portrayed as powerful but less than perfect souls and are utilized to provide moral guidance, understood in the broader sense to include all forms of self-discipline (tapas) which would encourage receptivity to Śiva's grace, they can be viewed as having a tropological function.[2] Just as the apologetic approach was complemented by the kerygmatic elements in the pāyiram, the tropological (moral) and anagogical (mystical) motifs complement one another in the body of the text and for this reason they will be examined together in this chapter.

THE WISE AND OTHERWISE

If knowledge was stressed it was because it was seen as providing the only basis for gauging religious growth. According to the Tirumantiram, individuals are to be judged

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[1]This term comes from Dante who, in a letter written to his patron Can Grande della Scala, explains that his Divine Comedy may be interpreted in several ways. In addition to the literal sense whereby the meaning of the text is taken at face value, he advocates looking for a deeper meaning which links the soul with the mystery of existence. This more mystical interpretation he designates anagogical.

[2]Dante, in the letter referred to in the previous note, also recognized a moral interpretation of texts. Citing the Exodus narrative, he explained that those who look for the moral sense will see the conversion of the soul from a state of sin to a state of liberation while those reading the text anagogically will see the departure of the soul from earthly bondage to eternal glory. Medieval exegetes used the term tropological to refer to the moral understanding of a given text. Paget Toynbee, Dantis Alagherii Epistolae, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966), p. 199.

not by their caste but by their level of understanding and ability to be grasped by the Truth or, rather, by the True One. The text is critical of those who substitute outer forms for inner substance:

> Do thread and (hair) tuft alone prove one a Brahmin?
> ... The real thread is Vedānta, the tuft
> (that matters) is wisdom.[1]
>
> Bereft of truth or wisdom
> Lacking in control of the senses, unable to
> focus the mind,
> Being without bhakti, devoid of divine truth,
> These are mad fools, not Brahmins![2]
>
> If the learned are able to grasp the inner meaning,
> (Then they are the ones approved by the Eye of grace.)
> But if the (so-called) learned fail to grasp the truth,
> They are the unlearned (for they) are blind to true
> Bliss.[3]

This emphasis on knowledge, which was characteristic of the Tamil siddhars, reflects the Tamil bias toward learning that is found succinctly stated in a well-known pre-Caṅkam verse: "Persons devoid of learning, though they be of higher birth, will not equal those of lower birth with learning's

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[1] nūluṅ cikaiyum nūvalir piramō
nūlatu vēntātam nūṉcikai ñāṉamam (TM 230 a,c).

[2] cattiyam iṉṟit taniṅñāṉan taṉiṉṟi
otta viṭaiyamaviṭṭorum uṇarvinṟip
pattiyum iṉṟi paraṉ uṇmai miṉṟip
patterum mutar piramanar tam aṉṟe (TM 231).

[3] kallā tavaruṅ karuttaṟi kātciyai
vallā ṟenil aruṭ kaṇṇaṉ matittuḷōr
kallātār uṇmaipaṟ ṟaniṟpar kaṟṟorun
kallātar iṉpam kāṇuki lārē (TM 310).

worth."[1]

For Mūlar, the dividing line is to be drawn between the wise (arivar) who possess true wisdom (ñānam) and the ignorant fools (mūtarkal) who do not know the one Lord who is implicitly referred to in the Vedas and openly celebrated in the Āgamas. From the pāyiram on, the latter groups are variously described as "those who think not (ninaikkilār) on the Lord,"[2] as "those who do not comprehend (tērār) the transience of the world,"[3] as those who know not (ariyātavar) the frailty of the body,"[4] and again as "those who know not (ārē) the brilliant Flame abiding within themselves."[5] Being ignorant of the Lord, they remain ignorant of the nature of the material world as well as of their bodies and their own selves.

For Mūlar, there are varying degrees of ignorance or spiritual immaturity. The most unwitting of individuals are those who blithely invest their energies in satisfying temporal desires without demonstrating any awareness of the fact that wealth, youth, beauty and life itself are transitory. Failing to recognize their real plight, these persons

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[1] mērpirantā rāyinum kallātār kilppirantum
karrar anaittilar pāṭu
Tirukkural, vs. 409.

[2] TM 13.

[3] TM 177.

[4] TM 190.

[5] TM 178.

are inevitably caught off guard when death arrives. Their situation is graphically portrayed in the first tantra of the Tirumantiram. One minute they are carefreely eating, drinking and making love; the next they feel a sharp pain as their heart gives way.[1] Or, one moment they are being borne aloft on a fine palanquin accompanied by a large entourage and shortly thereafter, their remains are being transported on a crude bier escorted by only a few half-hearted mourners.[2] According to Mūlar's analysis, such individuals were deficient in self-discipline (tapas) and wanting in social responsibility (dharma).[3] For those who continued to live in this unreflective fashion and thus contributed to the erosion of the social order, an unending cycle of rebirths was seen as the fate awaiting them.

In addition to this type of spiritually immature person, there was another type composed of those who observed the rudimentary prescripts and proscripts of the sacred texts, but who, because of their uncritical reliance on the externals of religion had become stunted in their religious growth. These individuals had their own shortcomings which, though they were less blatant, were no less a hindrance to

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[1] TM 148.

[2] TM 149, 150.

[3] Here it is worth noting that Mūlar does not require conformity to a particular interpretation of dharma but in keeping with his pluralistic outlook urges that individuals be made to abide by the moral injunctions of their respective faiths (camaya). TM 247.

achieving the ultimate goal of union with Śiva. They were not only superficial in their approach to ritual but they neglected to ponder the deeper meaning of the numerous myths which had become the mainstay of the Āgamic Śaiva tradition

> From ancient times, this world has had its
> many lords (pati) and
> Performed its many rituals (vitti) yèt it
> knew not the One Truth (onrumey).[1]
>
> Fools (mūṭarkaḷ) say the Ancient One with
> the water-laden braid
> Destroyed three cities.
> What are called 'three cities' are but the
> three malas (impurities)
> Shooting (i.e., destroying) that (kind of)
> city who will understand![2]

If Mūlar came down especially hard on those who were content with a literal reading of such narratives, it was because he thought of myth as a vehicle of religious instruction that was meant to challenge the bearer to delve deeper into the metaphysical, moral and mystical facets of their faith.

It was this type of growth in understanding that

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[1] TM 33a,b.

[2] appaṇi ceñcaṭai ātipurātaṉaṉ
muppuram ceṟṟaṉaṉ eṉparkaḷ mūṭarkaḷ
muppura mavatu mumala kariyam
appura meytamai yāraṟivārē (TM 343).

In this myth of the Tripuras, the asuras or enemy gods are seen to have constructed three supposedly invincible cities from which they are able to lead raids against the devas. The latter, however, turn to Śiva for protection. With a single fiery arrow released by Śiva all three cities are burned to the ground.

distinguished the wise or truly learned from the ignorant and so-called learned. While it was understood that new devotees, at the outset of their spiritual journeys, would need to concentrate on learning the fundamentals of the more basic sādhanas (religious disciplines) of caryā and kriyā, it was also important to see that these individuals did not confuse the means with the end. It was Mūlar's intent not only to urge them on to the more advanced sādhanas of yoga and jñāna but to show them how dimensions of the latter were available in each of the four paths. Verses 1477-1506 explain how, depending on the intensity of their commitment, participants in each of the sādhanas can come to a more profound understanding of themselves, the world and the One who is the very source of their existence. For example, the performing of religious duties (caryā) such as cleaning the temple precincts or taking part in a pilgrimage can be done perfunctorily. This is known as the caryā of caryā. When the same activity is performed as an act of worship offered to the Lord, it becomes known as the kriyā of caryā. That is, the activity is regarded as equivalent to a sacred ritual when the right intention accompanies it. The same activity can be further upgraded to the point where it is called the yoga of caryā when one meditates on the offering of the deed. Finally, the highest form of the practice is reached when there is an experience of the Lord in and through the duty performed. This is the jñāna in caryā.

At this point when caryā has been transformed into selfless service of the Lord it actually becomes a true expression of the highest form of knowledge.[1] Kriyā and yoga as well as jñāna are also divided in this way[2] with each practice having the potential of bringing the devotee to some degree of knowledge (jñāna)[3] and ultimately to its fullness:

> The bhaktas are followers of the caryā path
> The followers of kriyā - they are the true servants (of the Lord); who wear the outward signs (i.e., ashes, beads) of grace,

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[1]Whereas later sittars were said to be inimical to such external practices, Mūlar was quite balanced in his instruction. It was the level of understanding that determined the worth or worthlessness of an act. Desirous of making knowledge available to the masses and not the élite few, he insisted that "the basic path of caryā is indispensable to the well-known creed of the Śuddha Śaivas." (TM 1443). As he saw it, those who go from city to city and shrine to shrine singing the praises of the Lord will find that Śiva will make His temple in their hearts. (TM 1445).

[2]Caryā of kriyā is the doing of the ritual, the kriyā of kriyā involves seeing the ritual as worship, the yoga of kriyā involves meditation on one's performance and jñāna arises when the ritual brings one to an experience of the Lord. The caryā, kriyā, yoga and jñāna of yoga involve, respectively, the practice of the eight-fold yoga, intending yoga to be a form of worship, meditating and realizing higher forms of dhyāna (attentiveness), and the culminating experience of samādhi (full contemplation). The stages of jñāna are also fourfold. The caryā of jñāna is to become like Śiva, kriyā is the worship of the Lord within, yoga is the inner uniting and the jñāna of jñāna is the fulfillment of the spiritual quest in enjoyment of Śiva.

[3]According to tradition, Appar realized moksa by perfecting the path of caryā known as the Dāsa Mārga or servant path; Campantar attained mukti by following the Satputra Mārga (path of the son) associated with the practice of kriyā; Cuntarar by following the Sakha Mārga or path of the friend linked to the yogic sādhana, while Maṇikkavācakar perfected the path of jñāna known simply as the Sanmārga, the good path.

> Those who practice the eightfold yoga are the pure
> yogis who have achieved siddhi (spiritual powers)
> All these will finally obtain Śiva ñānam!
> (knowledge of Śiva).[1]

The great souls are those who came to realize the jñāna contained in each of the sādhanas, the ignorant are those who rest content with anything less. It was to bring devotees to the higher levels of moral and mystical awareness that Mūlar creatively re-presented a number of Śaiva myths which were well-known in the South.

THE MORAL TRANSFORMATION OF MYTHIC FIGURES

The Eight Heroic Deeds

The South, as we have seen in chapter three, was familiar with a wide range of northern Purāṇic myths, but there were eight, in particular, that came to be almost exclusively associated with Śiva's saving activity in the land of the Tamils. These eight, known as the aṣṭavīrattas (Tml. aṭṭavīrattāṉams), recalled the various feats of Śiva in which he triumphed over (1) the Asura Andhaka who harassed the devas, (2) Dakṣa, the son of Brahmā, who invited all the gods but Śiva to his sacrifice, (3) the arrogant Brahmā who claimed supremacy, (4) the demon Jalandhara who plundered

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[1] paṭṭar caritai paṭuvōr kiriyaiyōr
aṭṭaku toṇṭar aruḷvēṭat tākuvōr
cutta viyamāti cātakar tūyōkar
cittar civañāṉañ ceṉṟeyatu vōrkaḷē
(TM 1446)

the wealth of the devas, (5) the overbearing lords (asuras) who ruled the infamous three cities (Tripura), (6) the demonic elephant Gajasura who was sent by jealous Brahmins to attack Him,(7) Kāla, the god of death who threatened the life of a devout Śaiva devotee, and lastly, (8) Kāma, the archer of love who tried to distract Him from yogic concentration.[1]

These are the very myths with which Mūlar begins his instruction regarding the moral transformation needed to attain the final liberating union with Śiva. In each of eight successive verses[2] he identifies the mythic figure, alludes to the latter's failing and concludes with a brief indication of the punishment each received. He is not concerned with the details of the narratives as they occur in the Purāṇas but moves quickly to lay bare the moral lesson to be learned. For example, Verse 339 shows the connection between the disciple and Andhaka by likening this asura to the god of death who resides in one's own mental faculties and brings afflictions not only to the devas but to all

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[1]The tradition which holds that the above feats took place within the bounds of Tamil nāṭu, is seen in the following anonymous Tamil verse quoted by Dorai Rangaswamy, Religion and Philosophy, p. 374: "These are in this world the heroic feats of Him who adorns Himself with honeyed koṉṟai and the moon (destroying the following): The head of the Lord of the flower at Kaṇṭiyūr; Andhaka at Kōvalūr, Tripura at Atikai, the father-in-law (Dakṣa) at Pariyal; Jalandhara at Viṟkuṭi, the elephant at Vaḷḷurvūr; Kāma at Kuṟukkai and Yamā at Kaṭavūr.

[2]TM 339-346.

souls (uyirkalai ellām), themselves included. His being pierced by Śiva suggests the destruction of evils associated with the mind and heart.

In similar fashion the narrative of Dakṣa[1] was used to attack one specific evil - the conceit of knowledge manifested in the self-satisfied performance of religious rituals. Ostensibly, Dakṣa sinned by refusing to invite Śiva to his sacrifice but as Mūlar understands it, the error was one of perception. That is, he failed to recognize (a) that the ritual fire is but a symbol of the illuminating Flame dwelling within each person and, (b) that, in fact, Śiva cannot be excluded from the ritual since he "mingles with Agni's own nature (to purify) from within."[2] His sin, which is equated with murder, is punished by having his head replaced with that of a goat in order to provide a lesson for the rest of the world.[3] As Dorai Rangaswamy observes, the proud murderer has thus become converted into a meek lamb.[4] This myth was particularly well-suited to exemplify the process of conversion in that it enabled Mūlar to draw out a number of tropological implications from the behavior of the devas who attended the ill-fated sacrifice. When confronted by Śiva, some devas chose to continue their defective

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[1] TM 340.

[2] appaṭicē yatu nīrmaiyai yuḷ kalantu (TM 355c).

[3] TM 340.

[4] Religion and Philosophy, p. 335.

worship. These were quickly sent scurrying by His anger.[1] Others, crestfallen and full of sorrow, approached Śiva with worship and supplication saying, "Iraivā! nam." (O Lord, I bow before you).[2] Of all the devas present,however, it is Viṣṇu who provides the clearest picture of the ideal penitent. He seeks to reconcile with the Lord by confessing Dakṣa's fault as his own and by turning to the self-discipline of tapas.

> Visnu, in order to make peace (with Śiva)
> rose up (saying),
> "My Father, not he (i.e., Dakṣa), but we
> ourselves (are to blame)
> For falling into the fetter-making pāśam
> in this world." (As he) performed tapas
> The great unending Lord showed His grace.[3]

When the aṣṭavīrattas are viewed in light of this verse, they can be seen for what they were, namely, manifestations of the Lord's grace designed to win over the erring. The painful aspect is to be associated with the obscuring phase of the Pañcakritya. This is in keeping with the essentially Tamil understanding of these myths which looked upon all the heroic feats as acts of God's grace.[4]

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[1] TM 353.

[2] TM 352.

[3] canti ceyakkaṇṭeḻukiṉṟa ritāṉum
"entai yivaṉalla yāmē!" ulakiṉiṟ
pantañ cey pācattu vīḻntu, tavañceyya
anta milāṉum aruḷ purintānē (TM 354).

[4] The hymns of Cuntarar clearly show this was the way the aṣṭavīrattas were being interpreted. See D. Rangaswamy, Religion and Philosophy, p. 180, 181.

For them, power was not to be equated with force but with the grace of love. Even terrific forms were modified and made to connote the qualities of forgiveness and love. For example, the grotesque image of Śiva removing one of Brahmā's five heads and filling it with the blood of Viṣṇu, which is alluded to in verse 341, was actually mitigated in the imagination of the Southerner who had come to think affectionately of Śiva as one who carries Brahmā's head to collect alms (of devotion) from his followers. The fact that Śiva removed only one of the five heads was likewise interpreted as a sign of Śiva's magnanimity.

The myth of Jalandhara's encounter with Śiva is mentioned only briefly in the Tirumantiram. He is portrayed as having contended with Śiva out of ignorance since he did not know the omniscient Lord who authored the precious Veda and its sixty-four auxiliary arts.[1] His effortless defeat of this ignorant one can be seen to set the stage for reinterpreting the Tripura narrative. Here devotees are asked to see themselves as the rulers of the three cities (i.e., malas) which must be destroyed.[2] The fools (mūṭarkaḷ) are those who fail to see the struggle as relevant to their own lives. As for the devas present at the sacrifice, which not only sought to exclude Śiva but was kindled in order to produce a demonic elephant that would

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[1] TM 342.

[2] TM 343.

destroy Him, they came to know the purifying character of the One who rose up in the midst of that fire.

Here it should be noted that the Tripura and Gajāha myths were especially significant for rulers who were devotees of Śiva, since both of these narratives had a history of being favored by those seeking religious legitimation for their conquests. The Tamil epic Cilappatikāram describes how the dance of kotukotti, commemorating the burning of the three cities, was performed on a chariot before the Cēra King Cenkuttuvan to celebrate his victorious return from a northern tour.[1] In similar fashion, the Gajāha Saṁhāra was favored by Pallava monarchs as is evident from the Paṉamalai Temple inscription where the Pallava king, Rājasiṁha (8th c. A.D.) describes himself as "the Rājasiṁha, the Vanquisher of elephants."[2] When the Tripura and Gajāha mūrtis (images) are re-presented in the Tirumantiram, they are stripped of this triumphant slant and are shown, instead, to uphold the ideal of power being synonymous with graciousness toward the enemy. Whereas religious sculptures, dances and inscriptions of the time tended to show successful generals approaching the king, the Tirumantiram has the enemy arriving to seek the mercy of Śiva.

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1 Cilap. 28. 67-75. For descriptions of the sculptured reliefs of the Tripura Episode portrayed on various temple panels, see Dorai Rangaswamy, Religion and Philosophy, p. 306-317.

2 Ibid., p. 346.

For Śiva's victory over the asuras and wayward devas is complete not when the latter are defeated but when they finally surrender.

> Having a change of heart, the many immortals pray,
> May the goodness-filled ninefold sacrifice bring (us) bliss,
> O Lord, who sets cities on fire with a bow,
> So that the evil asuras come to an end.[1]

If Mūlar singled out Dakṣa for condemnation it was not for performing the sacrifice but for excluding its essence - Śiva! Devotees who become caught up in the chanting and tending the cultic fire are not unlike Dakṣa in this respect - for they too, fail to invite the Lord to rise up within themselves:

> The tapas - performing devas recite the holy japa,
> Constructing the cooking pit with the (appropriate) havis mantra.
> (But) it is bad to kill the mantra by which those doing japa
> Come to an awareness of themselves.[2]

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[1] nallār navakuṇṭam oṉpatum iṉpurap
pallār amarar parintaruḷ ceykeṉa
villār purattai vilaṅkerikōttavaṉ
pollā acurarkaḷ poṉṟum paṭikkē (TM 360)

[2] ceviman tirañcollun ceytavat tēvar
aviman tirattiṉ atukkaḷai kōlic
ceviman tirañceytu tālura nōkkum
kuviman tiramkol koṭiyatu vāmē (TM 359).

Properly understood, religious rituals should move devotees beyond the preliminary caryā and kriyā phase of kriyā, on to grasp the yogic and jñānic dimensions of ritual activity. This we see in the following verse where the immortals, engaged in kriyā of ritual chanting, accompanied by the specific tapas of yogic concentration, successfully prepare the path for Śiva to move upward from the mūlādhāra and bestow grace from within.

> Seeing the snake, the lowly fire (coiled in the mūlādhāra) which confers (true) purity,
> The immortals sang (His) praise and (Śiva) blossomed.
> While concentrating on (literally, "going to grasp") the reddening One,
> He came rushing through the great pleasure-giving path.[1]

This glimpse of the immanent Lord gives the devotee insight into yet another of the aṣṭavīrattas, the destruction of Kāla, better known as Yama, the deva of death. According to the version favored by the Tamils, Yama was about to claim the life of a youthful Śaiva devotee when the latter spontaneously began to embrace the liṅga. At this

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[1] alarntiṟun tāneṉṟamarar tutippak
kulantarum kīḻaṅki kōḷuṟa* nōkkic
civanta paramitu ceṉṟu katuva
uvanta peruvaḻi yōṭivantāṉē (TM 357).

*The Tamil lexicon gives a variety of meanings for the word 'kōl' including obscuration, swallowing, killing and snake; the latter being derived from the myth in which a snake consumes the ambrosia of the gods and for this was cut and killed (kol). 'Snake' is best suited to the context.

point, Śiva springs forth from the liṅga and overcomes the messenger of death, with a kick of his foot. As Mūlar interprets this myth, there is a direct connection between kindling the kuṇḍalinī and overcoming death.

> Looking intently (one will perceive) that
> Single Being (oruvan) surging up
> From the mūlādhāra up to the point of exit
> at the sahasāra).
> By means of the yoga of scorching fire,
> the god of death was overcome
> (literally, 'kicked')
> He (of the fire) is the one who rests
> comfortably in the region of
> Kaṭavūr.[1]

Given the important role yogic concentration plays in the spiritual development of an individual, it is not difficult to see why Mūlar relates the Kāma episode last. Kāma is the final obstacle for the devotee to overcome and,

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[1] mūlat tuvārattu mūḷum oruvaṉai
mēlait tuvārattu mēluṟa nōkkimuṟ
kāluṟṟuk kālaṉaik kāyntaṅki yōkamāy
ñālak kaṭavūr nalamāy iruntatē (TM 345).

Also vs. 222

> ōmattuḷ aṅkiyiṉ uḷḷuḷaṉ em irai
> īmattuḷ aṅki iratańkol vāṉuḷaṉ
> vēmattuḷ aṅki viḷaivu viṉai kkaṭal
> kōmattuḷ aṅki kuraikkaṭal tāṉē.
>
> My Lord is inside the inner fire of the Homa
> He is in the destructive fire
> He is the fire of the warp and woof that
> preserves the karmic law
> and scorches the surging sea
> He is the (salvific) fire of the
> great stick (which churned) the roaring sea.

In this latter verse we see how Mūlar links the Vedic fire to the operations of the Pañcakṛitya.

in a sense, is a greater threat than Yama. Yama cannot defeat the yogī whereas Kāma, with his power to distract, can. Therefore verse 346 can be read as an exhortation to devotees to override the disruptive activity of this deity by taking advantage of the rare tapas or yoga, an exhortation which is reiterated even more forcefully in the fifth tantra where Mūlar wants to focus on the goal which unites the Śaiva community:

> There is nothing/none but Śivam - proclaim this!
> The tapas of becoming Śivam - other than that
> there is nothing![1]

At this point, one becomes like Devī who, because of her single-minded resolve, was able to teach the devas the art of winning over Śiva.[2] This fullness of worship is called bhakti.[3]

If we pause here a moment to evaluate the social implications of the way in which these myths have been presented, we can see how skillfully Mūlar has woven together the Vedic, Āgamic and Tamil bhakti elements and perspectives. According to K. Shunmukhasundara Mudaliar, the Vedic, Āgamic and Purāṇic traditions each had a distinctive way of approaching myth. He writes, mythic "forms are

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[1] civamallatillai yaṟaiyē; civamān
tavamalla tillai. (TM 1534 a,b)

[2] TM 347.

[3] paṭiyāra aruccittup patti ceytāḷē
Having worshipped fully, she did bhakti (TM347d)

referred to in the Vedas as forms of meditation; in the Āgamas as forms of worship for the salvation of the bhakta and in the Purāṇas as stories describing those who were thus saved."[1] Add to this Tamil preference for viewing these images as various forms of grace made manifest at particular shrines in Tamil land and one sees the extent to which Mūlar brought together facets of each. In the final analysis, however, it is the yogic interpretation of Śaiva mythology that draws together these diverse perspectives. By challenging individuals to explore the deeper meaning of their outward forms and practices, it enables individuals to experience the underlying unity which supports, mediates between and integrates different levels of consciousness, different forms of worship and different kinds of religious groupings. As Mūlar sees it, those who can sustain a yogic level of humility and loving understanding are the truly learned, the truly wise (telintār):

> The (supposedly) lucid may become confused,
> agitated, but you, do not be disturbed.
> Melt in love for the Ancient Lord;
> He destroyed Dakṣa's sacrifice
> Yet those who repented, he graciously blessed.[2]

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[1] Quoted by Rangaswamy in Religion and Philosophy, p. 193.

[2] telintār kalaṅkiṉum nīkalaṅkātē
aḷintāṅ kaṭaivatem ātip pirāṉai
viḷintāṉatu takkaṉ vēḷviyai vīyac
cuḷintāṅ karuḷceyta tūy moḻiyāṉē. (TM 361)

Related Heroic Deeds - The Spoils of Surrender

In the Tirumantiram, repentance involves acknowleding and taking responsibility for one's failings or errors. (Recall Viṣṇu's confession in verse 349). Such gestures signal the initial stage of surrender to Śiva, the surrender of egotistic pride. At a deeper level, however, repentance requires something more. It calls for re-directing of one's energies such that they turn back or return to their 'source' which is One. For this task, mental concentration is needed. In yogic literature the mind is often likened to a body of water. When it is disturbed, ripples appear and images are multiplied and distorted. Only when its movement is stilled does the calm surface reflect reality in its wholeness, its at-one-ment. This contrast is brought out in several verses. In verse 362 we hear of "floods rising, swelling and covering dark mountains (or the boundaries of the womb) as the two (Brahmā and Viṣṇu) contend with each other." When Śiva approaches, as the fiery liṅgam, the celestials are blinded by his radiance and rush into the turbulent waters.[1] They are saved from the cold sea (i.e., saṁsāra) only by the calming words of the Lord: "Fear not, do not fall into the waves (or, be without desire)."[2] In gratitude, they circumambulate the

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[1] TM 363

[2] Ibid.

Lord but this circling indicates they have only partially understood the intent (karuttu) of Śiva who "rises above (their waves of thought) in order to bestow the ocean of knowledge from above (mēleluntap puraṅ kaṅkaṭal ceyyam)"[1]

If the devas and immortals have difficulty discerning the Lord this does not mean it is an impossible task. On the contrary, the Tirumantiram reminds its audience that

> There are indeed people in this world
> who are capable of seating (in the heart)
> The Self-Existent One who is able to
> integrate the worlds into a uni-verse.
> When the roaring of the sea confounds them
> He mercifully places the fire (there) as the
> limit (to contain) the waters.[2]

Whether or not one attains knowledge of Śiva depends on one's inner disposition rather than apparent status. When Brahmā and Viṣṇu contend with one another, their searching becomes a vain endeavor.[3] When they contain their pride and circumambulate the liṅgam, they come to participate in the power of Śiva as it is manifested in the symbols of the cakra and scythe.[4] Even more is given to prayerful devotees. They

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[1] TM 364 c,d

[2] camaikkaval lāṉai cayampuveṉ ṟēṭṭi
amaikkaval lāriv vulakkattu ḷārē
tikaitteṉ ṉīriṟ kaṭaloḷi ōcai
mikaikkoḷa aṅki mikāmaivait tāṉē. (TM 365)

[3] TM 372-375

[4] TM 349 The cakra signifies protection, the sword signifies discrimination (viveka), knowledge. See also verse 368 where Viṣṇu is unable to contain the gift of power symbolilized by the cakra. He prays and Śiva divides its power.

receive the power of His bliss-granting feet (i.e. they receive mokṣa or salvation).[1] Ironically, those who completely surrender to the gracious Lord are truly victorious ones: "If you submit, the Lord will create for you an everlasting body (taniyinum mannutal annalcey vānē).[2]

At this critical moment of grace (anugraha), the dialectical relationship between the religious quest and the horizon projected by the two pivotal myths of the Liṅgōdbhava and Pañcakritya becomes most evident:

> Knowing the true path (meynneri) which, from the beginning, held
> The great Light rising, transcending and embracing everything,
> The world will come embracing the great powerful sceptre (i.e. liṅgam)
> And the fivefold grace will indeed follow.[3]

The religious implications are clear. The paths followed by the various Śaiva groups can easily co-exist provided the primary focus is on the presence of Śiva dwelling within the kundalinī path. There is a correspondence between one's grasp of the inner liṅgam and one's experience of grace - the more subtle the liṅgam one embraces, the more intense the experience of grace.

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[1] TM 379

[2] TM 420 d

[3] aliṅ kaṉañcey teḻunta parañcuṭar
mēliṅṅan vaittatōr meynneṟi muṉkaṇṭu
aliṅ kanañceytu lakam valamvarum
kōliṅ kamaiñcaruḷ kūṭalu māmē.
(TM 378)

MYSTICAL TRANSFORMATION BEYOND MYTHIC FIGURES

Kindling the Fire Within

As the mind stills and more clearly reflects the illuminating radiance of the kundalinī, the devotee begins to bear a strong resemblance to the sage Agastya whose activities are described by Tirumūlar in the opening of the second tantra just prior to his recounting of the astavīrattas. According to the Purāṇic tradition recognized by the Tamils, Agastya was a North Indian Brahmin sage who came to the South, bringing with him Śaiva devotion and temple worship.[1]

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[1] A number of legends are associated with the figure of Agastya. He is known as a Vedic ṛsi (seer) and stories are told of his miraculous birth from a fertile seed deposited in a pitcher. He is credited with having composed Vedic hymns as well as works on mysticism, worship, medicine and alchemy but as K. Zvelebil observes in his The Poets and The Powers (London: Rider and Co., 1973) p. 71, the latter assortment of writings are too modern to even predate 1500 A.D. and thus could hardly be traced to the Vedic age. There is, however, an old Tamil tradition which links Agastya to the South by acknowledging him as the Father of Tamil and claiming that he prepared the earliest work on Tamil grammar from which the extant Tolkāppiyam (2nd-4th A.D.) was derived. Yet even this legend cannot be traced back further than Nakkīrar's commentary to this Iraiyanar Akapporuḷ composed about eighth century A.D. when there was a pronounced move toward Sanskritization and demonstration of the Aryan connection. The oldest strand of legends that would pre-date the Tirumantiram are those found in the Epics and Purāṇas and, in these, Agastya is presented as the sage who Aryanized the South, in particular, by planting Aryan religious rites. A plausible date for the pre-legendary historical Agastya or Agastya family would be about 700 B.C. For a detailed discussion of the Agastya myths in their Aryan and Dravidian forms, see K. N. Sivaraja Pillai, Agastya in Tamil Land (Madras: University of Madras, (no date) and O. C. Gangoly, "The Cult of Agastya: and the Origin of Indian Colonial Art", The Quarterly Journal of the Mythic Society, vol. XVII, no. 3, January, 1927, pp. 169-191.

The Skandhapurāna[1] records an incident where a Pandyan king who had desecrated a shrine was advised by Agastya to make expiation by offering homage at a local Śiva liṅgam. Later, Cuntarar was to describe Agastya as the one who "worships the erect form of the deity in order to balance the world by tapas."[2] As for his status in the Tamil region and his value as an examplar, Sivaraja Pillai leaves little room for doubt:

> No tradition is so widespread throughout the length and breadth of the Tamil country as that concerning sage Agastya and his numerous exploits. Of all the mythic, semi-historic and historic personages of the Aryan annals, who have figured in South Indian History, Agastya has occupied the foremost place and secured the largest homage of the cultured and the masses alike.[3]

When the yogī author of the Tirumantiram looked at this most popular sage, he saw him as the prototype of the ideal Śaiva devotee. For Agastya was one who sought to kindle the fire that would bring tranquility to an unbalanced, disturbed world. In fact, depending on how one interprets the following verses, it is possible to see Agastya as the representation of Śiva Himself.

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[1] Maheśvara khanda, Arunachala Māhātmya.

[2] (Tēvāram 7.65.5) The allusion here is to the legend relating how the earth became lopsided due to the influx of sages and devas for Śiva's wedding. Seeing this, Śiva chose Agastya to lead a group south in order to restore the earth's balance. D. Rangaswamy suggests that Cuntarar may be referring to Agastya's installation of a fixed or immovable liṅga and he speculates on whether the latter would have been a mukha liṅga. Religion and Philosophy, pp. 520-521.

[3] Agastya, p. 1.

"Losing its balance, this world glides
Falling downward, O Great Lord!" (cried the devas).
The Lord replied,
"You, Agastya, having the fire in the center
(by tapas),
Go (South) to the tip of this digressing world
and lead it.[1]

The phrase "Īcan naṭuvula aṅki" could also be read as "The Lord who is the inner fire" replied, 'Agastya, go to the tip....' In one reading the emphasis is on Agastya having the fire; in the other, it is on Śiva being the fire. Rather than choosing between the readings it would seem that they should be taken together and be allowed to enrich the meaning of the verse as a whole. In other words, the fire which Agastya has within him is to be seen as Śiva just as the Lord whom Brahmins invoke is the Fire within fire (anaitunai antanar aṅkiyul aṅki anai)".[2] The connection between the sage and Śiva becomes even more obvious in verse 338.

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[1] naṭuvu nillā tivvulakam carintu
keṭukiṉṟatu emperumāṉ eṉṉa īcaṉ
naṭuvuḷa aṅki akattiya nī pōy
muṭukiya vaiyattu muṉṉir eṉṟāṉē (TM 337).

[2] TM 216 a. See also verse 221:
oṇcuṭa rāṉai ulappili nātaṉai
oṇcuṭa rāki eṉ ṉullat tirukkiṉṟa
kaṇcuṭa rōṉ ula kēḻuṅ kaṭanta at
taṇcuṭa rōmat talaivaṉu māmē
The immortal Lord is the pure Flame,
The pure Flame residing in my heart's core,
The Flame of the (third) eye which transcends
the seven worlds
Indeed He is the Lord of Homa's cool flame.

Agastya, who tends the rising fire
(or, the morning sacrifice),
(Is) with the One of the upward-turned
face who makes the fire/sun to rise.
He is, indeed, the great ascetic of the North
(who kindles) everywhere the prosperity -
bringing shining light.[1]

Alternately, the last two lines can be translated, "He is the great ascetic of the North./ He is, indeed, the light that shines and prospers everywhere." At this point the images converge and the sage becomes one with That which has been roused. Or, as Narayana Ayyar expresses it, Agastya symbolizes the grace of Śiva that enables an individual to rouse the kuṇḍalinī fire.[2] As this occurs, the anagogical import of the Agastya myth comes to the fore and the disciple is given a glimpse of the bliss-filled goal which he or she has yet to fully realize.

Cherishing the Body as Temple

If the apologetic interpretation of mythic figures stressed creation and the macrocosmic conditions for plurality, and the tropological interpretation underscored the tension that exists between terrestrial practices and their comprehension, the anagogical interpretation places great stress on the body as providing the microcosmic milieu in which and through which salvation comes to be realized.

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[1] aṅki utayam vaḷarkkum akattiyaṉ
aṅki utayañcey mēlpā llavanoṭu
maṅki utayañcey vaṭapāl tavamuṉi
eṅkum vaḷaṅkoḷ ilaṅkoḷi tāṉē (TM 338).

[2] Origin and History. pp. 225-256.

Not all devotees reach this level of understanding but as a yogī, Tirmūlar had been trained to look within himself for the spiritual forces that would bring about his liberation. As a Tamil siddhar he identified the latter with the immanent presence of Śiva. What distinguishes him from later siddhars and other yogīs is his affirmation of and positive regard for the human body. Whereas many belonging to these groups viewed the body as a hindrance and employed more or less extreme ascetic practices to subdue the senses, Mūlar valued the human body as a God-given instrument that was intended to facilitate the task of self-discipline and the soul's quest for God.[1] Initially, he, too, had had a negative attitude toward the body but all this quickly changed when he witnessed Śiva's dance in the sabha at Citamparam.

> I had previously considered the body
> a liability.
> Then I saw the Truth (porul) in the body.
> I saw the Lord dwelling in the body
> making it his temple.
> Now I cherish and preserve this body.[2]

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[1] This type of yoga, in which the senses are disciplined and controlled not by denying them but by employing them to celebrate the One who created them, is known as bhoga yoga, the yoga of enjoyment. For Mūlar, it was Śiva bhoga.

[2] uṭampiṉai muṉṉam iḻukkeṉ ṟiruntēṉ
uṭampiṉuk kuḻḻe yuṟuporuḷ kaṇṭeṉ
uṭampuḷē uttamaṉ kōyilkoṇ ṭāṉ eṉṟu
uṭampiṉai yāṉirun tōmpukiṉṟēṉē
(TM 725)

This realization moves him to meditate on how the Pañcakṛtya or fivefold operation of Śiva brings about a gradual unveiling of the Truth.[1] He seems particularly fascinated by the mystery (karuttu) of creation and the Lord's role in shaping and quickening the human form.[2] In the section immediately following his general description of the Pañcakṛtya, he sets aside some forty verses (451-491) to examine, in detail, how new bodies are created, their origin and how they develop in the embryonic and prenatal stages. For Mūlar, the act of bringing about the living body in the womb is the greatest of all gifts.[3] To communicate his initial reflections regarding this facet of the Lord's graciousness, he drew on a number of simple folk images. In one verse Śiva is likened to a potter (kucavan)[4] and in another, His relationship to the newly created body was likened to that of a mother-cow returning home to her shelter to lovingly take charge of her calf (paśu, i.e. soul).[5] In a similar vein, Śiva is also portrayed as a householder as He enters into a couple's enjoyment at the moment of conception.[6]

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[1] It is worth noting that Mūlar's basic description of the Pañcakṛtya is found in the second tantra immediately following his presentation of the aṣṭavirattas and related myths; the implication being that the mythic narratives were utilized to provide a popular introduction to the fivefold saving acts of Śiva.

[2] TM 1540

[3] TM 465b

[4] TM 443

[5] TM 1728 and 1759

[6] TM 465

When Mūlar describes the formation of the body, folk language comes to the fore. However, when he moves on to discuss the transformation and consecration of the body as the temple of God, he prefers to employ images associated with Śaiva mythology. In particular, he thinks in terms of the ocean-churning narrative but with an important variation. Whereas the traditional Purāṇic episode stresses the ineptitude of the devas and the need for Śiva to consume the poison brought to the surface by their unguided actions, Mūlar ponders an alternate scenario. He sees Śakti, the self-existent Lady of Truth and Mother of the heavenly world, churning out ambrosia which, when drunk, transforms the body into the temple of Śiva (civālayam).[1] In this sense, one can say to know the truth (mey) is, indeed, to know the body (mey).

This simile provides a fresh opportunity to discuss the temple rituals (kriyā) in relation to their meaning (porul). Central to the temple cult is the worship of the liṅgam and each of the castes has it own material for constructing this symbol. Brahmins use crystal, rulers gold, merchants emeralds and the poor folk pebbles. What most overlook is that the most precious of all materials is the body. In its own right it is designated the piṇṭa liṅgam

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[1] tāṉē eḷunta at tattuva nāyaki
ūṉē vaḷiceytem uḷḷē yiruntiṭum
vāṉōr ulakīṉṟa ammai matittiṭat
tēṉē parukic civālaya mākumē. (TM 719)

and when an individual realizes Śiva, his or her body is said to become the Śiva liṅgam.[1] Because this liṅgam rises up within the body, it gives the devotee access to intimate knowledge which even the devas do not know.[2]

Pūjā (worshipping the deity), darśanam (viewing the deity) and abhiṣekam (anointing the deity), are similarly reinterpreted. Food offerings made to the moving temples, that is, to the wandering bhaktas and jñānis are said to be received by Śiva Himself.[3] Darśanam occurs when a devotee witnesses the Lord in the heart and sees no difference/distance between them.[4] As for the anointing, that returns us to Mūlar's image of ambrosia as it pours downward, bathing everything within.[5]

This, then, is how the yogī-author of the Tirumantiram images the final goal of life, salvation. It is an eternal "abiding with the sweet ambrosia-drenched Primal Lord," which is conferred upon those who "temple-ize" or interiorize (talintavarkku) the Lord.[6] However, before one is able to join Mūlar in proclaiming, "The Lord has made me His temple

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[1] TM 1750 describes Śiva's immanance in relation to the symbol of the liṅgam. Verse 490 describes it in relation to the mystery of conception. The seventh tantra mentions six kinds of Liṅgam: the aṇṭaliṅgam (world-form), piṇṭaliṅgam (body-form), catāśivamliṅgam (manifested God-form), ātmaliṅgam (soul-form), ñānaliṅgam (knowledge-form) and the Śivaliṅgam.

[2] TM 492

[3] TM 1857

[4] TM 492 and 2853

[5] TM 527

[6] TM 527

(en utal koyilkontānē),"[1] one must recognize that what lies between this projected possibility and its actual realization, is a gap in experiental understanding, a gap which the Tirumantiram specifically attributes to the failure to comprehend the profound truth veiled in mythic imagery. "People do not know the meaning of the dark neck,"[2] writes Mular, referring to the mark left on Śiva's throat after he consumed the poison. "People without first hand knowledge (unarviōr) will say that ... what has been consumed was poison."[3] He continues, "people worship speaking only lies. Yet if they only speak the truth, the One with the shiny black neck will cause them to be worshipped by the denizens of heaven."[4] In his commentary on this verse, G. Varadarajan explains that the phrase "poyyē yuraittup pukaltal" refers to those who "speak and praise without knowing the truth (tattva) of the mythology of the Purāṇas."[5] In the same vein, "meyye uraittal" (if only they speak the truth) means if only they would make clear to others the truths (tattvas) of Purāṇa without wasting time.[6] In other words, they should come to the point on the meaning of the myth and not get bogged down or side-tracked by the details of the mythic vehicle. What is the truth of the dark neck that they are

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[1] TM 1722d
[2] TM 521 a,b
[3] TM 521 c,d
[4] TM 522 d
[5] Tirumantiram (Tml.) (Trichy: Varadrajan, 1971)p.154.
[6] Ibid.

to see? It is that whatever is harmful to the devotee must be taken in by the Lord, but since the malas (fetters) corrupt from within like the blight which attacks the inside of the wood-apple tree, the soul, susceptible to attack must be consumed by Śiva to be restored to wholeness, oneness, pureness.[1]

What is it that hinders unity and needs to be purified? According to verses 528 and 529, it is the very concrete evils of enmity (pakai) and pride which teach one to be exclusive rather than inclusive.

> Those who have enmity of any kind
> will not reach the Lord
> Even in superficial enmity, the one (sin)
> becomes multiplied tenfold.[2]
>
> If there is a Brahmin who says, "I am Brahmin"
> To that degree, the Lord's remembrance declines.[3]

The truth contained in myth is not unrelated to this life and the daily frictions one must face. It is the guru, the bhakta, the jñāni who are seeking inner harmony that will be the ones

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[1]kariyuṉ viḷaviṉ kaṉipōl uyirum
uriya paramumuṉ nōtuñ civamum
ariya tūriyamēl akilamum ellān
tiriya viḷunkuñ civaperu māṉē
Like the wood-apple fruit which is eaten
by the disease from within.
(So) is the soul eaten.
The Great One, earlier praised as Śivam, the
one who is beyond the stage of turiya
He swallows everything without residue, making
everything Himself. (TM 2593).
Also vss. 2594, 2595. 'Sivam' designates the Absolute Godhead.

[2]eppakai yākilum eytār iraivaṉaip
poyppakai ceyyiṉum oṉṟupat tāmē. (TM 528 c,d)

[3]vētiya rayum vikirtaṉām eṉkiṉṟa

best prepared to instruct the world in social harmony. Thus the yogī has a critical social function as mediator. He or she has known the Source from whence the many came; he or she likewise knows the path by which members of society can return and in the process, become a community. As 'bhoga yogīs,' these individuals often choose to remain behind in the body in order to show the path to others. Thus they have a sense of mission to others. It is for this reason that verses 532-535 warn the society to protect its householder devotees (Śiva bhaktas) and jñānis.

> Disturbing the heart of the Lord's devotee,
> The land, country and prestige will be undermined.[1]

Unlike those who contend[2] and seek to magnify themselves either by falsely claiming equality with Śiva or else by asserting their superiority over others, the yogī[3] is seen as one whom Śiva Himself honors by causing him or her to be worshipped by the denizens of heaven.[4] In fact, such devotees are not only worthy to reside in the place of the celestials but they are even said to reign as their rulers.

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nītiyuḷ īcaṉ niṉaippoḻi vārē. (TM 529 c,d)

[1] Īca ṉaṭiyar itayaṅ kalaṅkitat
tēcamum nāṭun ciṟappum aḻintiṭum (TM 534 a,b)

[2] Verse 1556 clearly explains that those who contend are those not yet devoid of their ego-sense. Because of this they fail to ponder the meaning of life and death with the result that they have time to waste on religious squabbles.

[3] Used in the broad sense to include all those devotees who have come to know the yogic dimension of the fourfold Āgamic sādhanas of caryā, kriyā, and so on.

[4] TM 522 and 540.

At the time of going and reaching the
bank of Śiva, the flaming gold One,
The assembly of immortals will come
and welcome (these devotees) anointing
them with pots of water
Saying, "This one here is our glorious
leader."
Such is the blissful communion one can
experience.[1]

The Tirumantiram also speaks of the moment of uniting when the devas of the four directions will ask, "Who is this?" and will receive the reply from Siva that "That one is myself (aran nām avan)."[2] From this time (kālam)[3] onward the devotee is regarded as a fully liberated being (i.e. a jīvanmukta). He no longer worships or looks to any minor deities to lead him to Śiva for he has since become himself the locus of the trimūrti.[4] As verse 2954, explains "after becoming Him, who shall (the soul) meditate upon?" It may also be asked with whom the liberated soul can contend. Having become 'one-d' with Śiva, that person becomes one with everything that exists and has its source in Him.

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[1] cempoṟ civakati ceṉṟeyatuṅ kālattut
kumpat tamarar kuḻāmvan tetirkoḷḷa
empoṟ ṟalaivaṉ ivaṉā meṉaccoḷḷa
iṉpak kalavi irukkalu māmē. (TM 635)
Also verse 634.

[2] TM 636

[3] The connotation of this word is identical with that of the Greek kairos. It signifies a moment made special by the actualization of power and hidden potential.

[4] TM 638.

Having begun with an apologetic discussion in the pāyiram of how the One became many, Mūlar seeks to conclude his work with a mystical or anagogical portrayal of how it is possible for the many to become one-d (not two). By showing how the body becomes the locus of both the fivefold operations of grace and the emergence of the gracious liṅgam of Truth (tattva), Justice (natuval, i.e. balance, tranquility), and Love (anpu), Mūlar shows how the truths of the Pañckritya and Liṅgōdbhava myths converge when the mind is clear and the heart is pure. In this way he makes clear that the true mediator must be a yogī in spirit and in truth. Yet Mūlar does not rest content with recognizing the body as the temple or with identifying the liṅgam in both. As a bhakta, he cannot forget the Dance which literally brought him to his senses and not only taught him to appreciate the human form, but moved him to remain in this borrowed body in order to show the path to others.

Learning to Dance

As we have seen in an earlier chapter,[1] dance was an integral part of South Indian culture. It entertained the masses, celebrated the victories of warriors and inspired the religious fervor of countless devotees. A vivid picture

[1] CH. II.

of the latter is found in verse 2744:

> Devotees concentrate their minds on the
> golden feet of our Lord
> Who dances in lovely Citamparam
> They sigh and sob in joy. They become
> startled, spasmodically
> Falling down, their bodies shiver,
> they forget themselves and the
> faculties get benumbed.[1]

Dances were performed in the streets, the palace and the temple and they had no small part to play in popularizing the aṣṭavīrattas and other mythic narratives which subsequently came to bear a number of political and military overtones.

The dance which captured the religious imagination of Mūlar is thought to be one associated with the final destruction of the three cities (tripura).[2] In keeping with his understanding of this mythic narrative as symbolizing the purging of the three malas (āṇava, māyā and karma), the author of the Tirumantiram sees the dance which dramatizes it as a mystical rite of purification in which all are called to

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[1] vimmum veruvum vilumelum meycorun
tammaiyun tāmari yārkal caturketuñ
cemmai ciranta tiruam palakkūttul
ammalarp porpātat tanpuvaip pārkaṭkē

[2] This dance, known as the Pāṇṭaraṅkam, was the second half of the dramatic enactment of the burning of the three cities. The first half was the Koṭukuṭṭi, the dance performed for the Cera King Cenkuttuvan. Because Mūlar's mystical interpretation of the Lord's dance came to be associated with a later sculptural representation of the Ānanda Tāṇḍava or Dance of Bliss it was assumed that this was the dance witnessed by Mūlar. For a thorough discussion of this point see H. Kulke, Cidambaramahatmya, p. 128-130.

participate. The Dance, led by Śiva is, as it were, simultaneously performed on the open cremation grounds, the covered sabhā of the Citamparam temple and the enclosed sabhā of the devotee's heart[1] which is to "melt in love (anpō turuki)".[2] Mūlar is not a detached observer but one who is very much involved.

> I shall walk along with those who have
> the strength to run (about in pilgrimage).
> I shall live and revel on the surface of the
> earth.
> (Listening to) the sound (icai) of those who
> can sing.
> I shall join with those with strength to unite
> with the grace-conferring Lord of the
> devas.[3]

The Tamil bhakti cult is strongly endorsed in these verses. Reading on, we see how the dance was viewed as a way of capturing not only the heart for Śiva but the mind as well. For Mūlar, Śiva is love (anpu)[4] but this love is to be known in feelings, word (mantra) and thought. Warning that the Lord cannot be known by the undiscerning, he proceeds to recognize 'leaping' as a way of securing

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[1] TM 542

[2] TM 272c

[3] ōtaval lārtam rōṭu naṭāvuvaṉ
pāṭaval lāroḷi pārmicai vaḻkuvaṉ
tēṭaval lārkkaruḷ tēvar pirāṉoṭuṅ
kūṭaval lāraṭi kūṭavaṉ yāṉē (TM 543)
Also verse 2760.

[4] TM 270

knowledge experientially:[1]

> Those who know (Him) by leaping and
> worshipping His Feet,
> Secure (knowledge) and experience (Him)
> This indeed, is bliss.[2]

Dance provides the perfect expression of knowledge (jñāna) as it is understood in the anagogical or mystical sense, precisely because no real distinction can be made between the Dancer and the Dance. At the same time, the dance has many movements in which the drama is allowed to unfold in time. This, too, is important for Mūlar since he wants to show that the acquistion of wisdom is a dynamic process which allows for great diversity.

Having thus become alert and sensitive to the persuasive power of this religious symbol, Mūlar is moved to superimpose the Pañcākṣara and the Āgamic doctrine of the Pañcakritya on the mythic image of the Naṭarāj and subsequently makes one of the most significant and memorable contributions to the popular dissemination of his mystical insights. He accomplished this by providing a new iconology for the vigorous Tāṇḍava dance:

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[1] TM 1566

[2] pāyntuṇar vār cevaṭi kaitoḻu
tērntuṇar ceyvatōr iṉpamu māmē. (TM 1566 c,d)

The (hand) holding the drum, that which
is swung over;
That (which refreshes like) flowing water,
the hand holding fire
The lotus-like foot treading on the root
cause (of bondage)
Know that these represent the formless
or subtle Pañcākṣara (i.e. Śivāyanama).[1]

The drum of God represents creation; the
quieting posture
Shows His protection; the fire in his hand
is destruction.
In His firm standing posture is obscuration
implied.
Know also that His (uplifted) foot always
bestows grace.[2]

Whereas extant temple reliefs[3] commissioned by rulers in the sixth, seventh and eighth centuries suggest that the most popular dances were those associated with victory in war, the dance of Śiva described by Mūlar stresses spiritual meaning of puram namely, the destruction of malas. Whereas weapons were prominant in early temple reliefs portraying the Naṭarāj, they are played down in the Tirumantiram. In verse 2798, for example, the iconographic description identifies only one

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[1] maruvum tuṭiyuṭaṉ maṉṉiya vīccum
aṙuviya appum aṉaluṭaṉ kaiyum
karuviṅ mititta kamalap patamum
uruvil civāyanamaveṉavōtē (TM 2798)

[2] araṉ tuṭi tōṟṟam amaittal titiyām
araṉ aṅki tannil araiyil caṅkaram
araṉ uṟṟaṇaippil amarum tirōtāyi
araṉ aṭi yeṉṟum aṉukkirakam eṉṉē (TM 2799)

[3] C. Śivaramamurti, Naṭarājain Art, Thought and Literature, (New Delhi: National Museum, 1974), pp. 168-188.

weapon of destruction, the fire or fiery arrow and even then this is seen mainly as a symbol of purification. Still, it is not iconographic description but the iconological interpretation of Śiva's dance that conditioned later generations to balance out the puram aspect of the Naṭarāj with akam motifs of mercy, graciousness and love. In fact, the two aspects merge. For in correlating the fivefold operations with the gestures of the dance, Mūlar shows that nothing is really destroyed; instead everything is transformed. There is nothing that is not encompassed by the Dance(r). As the Lord sounds His drum, the Vedas and Āgamas begin to dance, the elements and the seven worlds begin to dance[1] and most important of all, human hearts begin to dance in unison with the rhythms of the universe.[2]

This vision of unity is not some romantic notion unrelated to the socio-religious conflicts of the time which Mūlar was seeking to alleviate. In the sixth and seventh centuries a number of different Hindu cults were active in Citamparam. There was the Viṣṇu cult[3] and the goddess cult[4]

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[1] TM 2722 and 2729

[2] TM 2756

[3] A shrine to Viṣṇu was constructed adjacent to that of of the Naṭarāj by Pallavamalla Nandivarman II (717-782 A.D.) That the Vaisnava presence in Citamparam was flourishing at least a century earlier is maintained by B. Natarājan on the basis of the hymns of Appar and Campantar, The City of the Cosmic Dance, Cidambaram, (New Delhi: Orient, Longman Ltd., 1974). p. 14.

[4] Manikkavācakar (9th century) refers to the goddess cult at Citamparam. Here it may also be noted that whereas the Patañjali Legend also refers to the goddess cult, it does so to suppress it. Indicative of this is the narration

as well as the liṅgam and dance cults dedicated to Śiva. At the time the Tirumantiram was being composed, the latter two were apparently beginning to vie with each other for center stage. To this day, a question remains about which cult was earlier in places like Citamparam.[1] Regardless of which was earlier, it can be safely assumed that under the influence of the Tamil bhaktas, the dance cult of the Naṭarāj was steadily increasing in popularity perhaps even at the expense of the liṅgam cult.

The nature of the antagonism developing between these two cults can be inferred from three Śaiva legends connected with Citamparam which originated between 600 and 1000 A.D. and were recorded in a Sanskrit work known as the Cidambara-māhātmya.[2] For our purposes, the Vyaghrapāda Legend and the Patañjali Legend are the most relevant. The former, written in an apologetic style to 'prove' that, from the beginning Citamparam was a Śaiva center, describes how the muni Vyaghrapāda journeyed there to worship Śiva in the mūlasthāna liṅga. Though composed after the dance cult had gained notoriety, it remains silent on this point which leads Kulke

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of Śiva's Tāṇḍava dance such that He defeats the goddess. By contrast, Mūlar takes a conciliatory stance toward the latter by making her an 'official' witness of the dance.

[1]Dorai Rangaswamy in his Religion and Philosophy, p. 193 raises this question but apparently finds no convincing evidence to make a judgment. From his study of the Vyaghrapāda legend, H. Kulke concludes that the liṅga cult is the earlier of the two. Cidambaramāhātmya, p. 43. By contrast, Paul Younger's reading of the same legend, together with his detailed study of the structural modifications of the Citamparam temple have led him to surmise that the cult of the Naṭarāj was the older of the two. The Citamparam Temple of the Lord Naṭarājan, unpublished manuscript, Hamilton, Ontario: McMaster University, pp. 23,24.

[2]The Cidambaramāhātmya (ci. 11th-12th century A.D.) includes the legend of Vyaghrapāda, Patañjali and Hiranyavarman.

to conclude that the conservative followers of the liṅga cult who composed this legend, were by no means amenable to the upstart dance cult of the Naṭarāj.[1] Yet, as Younger notes, it is no less likely that the Orthodox liṅga cult was attempting to suppress the 'pentecostal' dancers.[2]

The Patañjali Legend, on the other hand, describes how Vyaghrapāda leads the muni Patanjali to the liṅga at Citamparam only to find himself become caught up in the dance Śiva performs there. The rapprochement comes as the Lord of the Dance then asks them to worship His liṅga. In this way, respect is shown for the liṅga tradition but, cleverly so, by indicating that it was the Naṭarāj who commissioned it.

Without suggesting that such antagonism was as pronounced in Mūlar's time, I would, nevertheless, submit that basic elements of the tension were already being felt back then and that Mūlar was, in fact, paving the way for the rapprochement by focusing on the Liṅgodbhava and Pañcakṛtya myths and showing how they both converge in the mythic image of the Yogi Dancer.[3] As Yogi, Śiva sustains the liṅga cult represented by the Liṅgodbhava; as Dancer, He is the dynamic source of the fivefold saving acts of the Pañcakṛtya. Together these centripetal and centrifugal forces balance out, making possible a unity which sustains diversity.

For a description of its contents, see H. Kulke. Cidambaramāhātmya. A Tamil version of this Purāṇa is known as the Kōyil Purāṇa.

[1] Ibid. p. 43.

[2] The Citamparam Temple, pp. 23,24.

[3] The human form is Śivaliṅgam
The human form is Sadāśivam
The human form is the Sacred Dance (TM 1726 a,c,d)

CONCLUSION

Like the music accompanying the sacred dance, Mūlar's composition has its own syncopated rhythm. While developing an underlying theme of unity and diversity from three perspectives, namely the metaphysical, moral and mystical, it accents the practical ways of realizing both personal and social harmony. In this respect, the Tirumantiram complements Tiruvalluvar's Tirukkural, a Tamil text assigned to the second or third century A.D. Whereas the latter sought to show how the ideals for secular living were in harmony with the goals of spirituality, the former sought to show how progress in the spiritual life promoted values that were consonant with the highest goals of secular life.[1]

The spiritually mature persons are the bhaktas, yogīs and jñānis who have learned to discriminate what is essential from what is optional, what is central from what is peripheral. Knowing the Giver and the Gift to be one, they view the externals of religion as means and not ends; knowing the Lord who is the Way, they refuse to contend over individual paths; knowing the accessibility of the Creator who dwells within themselves, they recognize the tattva (truth) of the Vedic fire, the tattva of the temple liṅgam, the tattva of the

[1]This follows an assessment suggested by K. Vajravelu Mudaliar. Personal correspondence, December 5, 1978.

ecstatic dance; knowing the Lord of the Dance as the Source of all language manifested in sound, music and drama, they become more inclusive in the languages, chants and gestures they adopt for worship. In other words, these are the ones who understand the deepest meaning (porul) of Śaiva mythology. Like the liṅgam, the Truth is one; like the Pañcakṛtya symbolized by the dance, its manifestation is progressive and pluralistic. The fruits of this realization are tranquility, tolerance, love and peace.

Finally, like a musical motif repeated with successive variations, the Tirumantiram reiterates each of these themes; initially in an introductory manner that takes into account the novice status of the beginner and gradually in an increasingly more thorough manner corresponding to the levels of maturity of the advanced disciples. Accordingly, not only the message becomes more profound but the exegesis or interpretation of Śaiva mythology likewise moves from the apologetic through the tropological to the anagogical or mystical level of understanding. Rather than being a collection of isolated verses redacted by disciples, the Tirumantiram is, in fact, an exceptionally unified classic of Śaiva spirituality.

APPENDIX

Tirumantiram Verses
(from pages 210-211)

añcana mēṉi arivaiyōr pākattaṉ
añco tirupattu mūṉṟuḷa ākamam
añcali kuppi aṟupat taṟuvarum
añcā mukattil arumporuḷ kēṭṭatē (57)

aṇṇal aruḷāl aruḷuñ civākamam
eṇṇil irupatteṇ kōtinū ṟāyiram
viṇṇavar īcan viḷuppam uraittaṉar
eṇṇiniṉ ṟapporuḷ ēttuvaṉ nāṉē (58)

paṇṭita rāvār patineṭṭup pātaiyuṅ
kaṇṭavar kūṟuṅ karuttaṟi vāreṉka
paṇṭitar taṅkaḷ patineṭṭup pātaiyum
aṇṭa mutalāṉ aṟañconṉa vāṟē (59)

aṇṇal aruḷāl aruḷuntiv yākamam
viṇṇil amarar tamakkum viḷaṅkari
teṇṇil eḷupatu kōṭinū ṟāyiram
eṇṇilum nīrmēl eḷuttatu ākumē (60)

paraṇāyp parāparaṅ kāṭṭi ulakiṟ
raraṇāyc civataṉman tāṉēcol kalat
taraṇāy amararkaḷ arccikku nanti
uraṇaki ākamam ōṅkiniṉ ṟāṉē (61)

civamām parattiniṟ catti catācivam
uvamā makēcar uruttir tēvar
tavamāl piramīcar tammiltām peṟṟa
nava ākamameṅkaḷ nantiper ṟāṉē (62)

perranal ākamaṅ kāraṇaṅ kāmikam
urranal vīram uyarcintam vātuḷam
marrav viyamāḷa mākuṅkā lōttaran
turranar cuppirañ collu makuṭamē (63)

aṇṇal aruḷāl aruḷuñ civākamam
eṇṇili kōṭi tokuttiṭu māyiṉum
aṇṇal arainta arivari yāviṭiṉ
eṇṇili kōṭiyum nīrmēl eluttē (64)

māriyum kōṭaiyum vārpaṇi tūṅkaniṉ
rēriyu niṉraṅ kiḷaikkiṉra kālattu
āriya muntami ḻumuṭa nēcollik
kārikai yārkkuk karuṇaicey tāṉē (65)

aviḻkkiṉra vārum atukaṭṭu māruñ
cimiṭṭalaip paṭṭuyir pōkiṉra vārun
tamiḻccol vaṭacol eṉumiv viraṇṭum
uṇarttum avaṉai uṇaralu māmē (66)

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